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Foreword

The new issue the National Journal Education Development is another platform for national scholars and researchers to share their ideas and findings in the broad aspect of education. Guided strongly by liberalism in education philosophy, we have covered a wide range of topics or areas and research reports in this first issue. Ranging from distance learners to program planning, and from learning strategies to students behavior. We welcome scholars from all kinds of organization to share their views and work with the journal as well as with a wider community of critical readers, educators, program planners and practitioners in these areas.

In line with the new concepts, developments and challenges in education, an educator is no longer relevant with obsolete ideas but they are required to update their ideas, methods and technologies to warrant meaningful learning outcome. This journal published latest ideas and findings in helping the educators to update their knowledge and skill in this area.

Besides discussing purely about education, we have also included two articles on methods of effective interviews and online shopping behaviors among adult learners. These topics made this journal a unique issue that is believed to attract more scholars and readers to access this journal.

Institute of Education Development (InED)

Universiti Teknologi

MARA (UiTM) takes pride in its academic centres and numerous branch campuses in the various states in the country. The Institute of Education Development (InED) is one of the academic centres in UiTM that provides opportunities for those who wish to pursue their academic objectives.

The Institute of Education Development (InED) was formed in September 2001. InED now manages three types of programmes concurrently: the Distance Education Programmes, Collaborative Education Programmes and Continuing Education Programmes.

DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The objective of these programmes is to offer continuing education to upgrade the knowledge and career of Bumiputras. They also help to increase productivity and contribute to national development.

COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The main aim of these programmes is to provide opportunities for qualified Bumiputera students who do not have the opportunity to enter public universities to further their education in private colleges.

CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The Centre for continuing Education (CCE), established in 2002, emphasizes the utilization of Universiti Teknologi MARA's (UiTM's) human and structural capital for enhancement of knowledge. These programmes are offered to the public.

How Not To Stifle Respondent's Candour: Establishing Credibility & Motivating Individuals To Respond During Interviews

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Abstract

One method of collecting data is to interview respondents to obtain information on the issues of interest. Carrying out an inquiry involving humans and trying to obtain honest information from them is often a challenge to a researcher. Based from our experience in previous researches, the main aim of this paper is to provide practical insights and discusses general issues in interviewing together with the practicalities of carrying out types and styles of interview. Interviewees can bias the data when they do not express their true opinions thus, it is critical to establish rapport with the respondents and to motivate them to give responses and allaying whatever concerns they may have about the research and its consequences. We proposed that in order to profitably utilizing interviewing techniques, the interviewers must know how to start an interview, how to proceed with the questions, how to motivate respondents to answer, what to look for in the answers and how to close an interview. Researchers do not become good interviewers just by reading about it. Skills are involved which require practice. The tips provided in this paper should become a part of their repertoire for interviewing.

Keywords : interview, rapport, tips

Introduction

Carrying out an inquiry involving humans and trying to obtain honest information from them is often a challenge to a researcher. Often, the interviewees do not express their true opinions thus bias the data that we critically need. It is critical to establish rapport with the respondents and to motivate them to give responses and allaying whatever concerns they may have about the research and its consequences. Using our experience in previous quantitative and qualitative accounting research, the main aim of this paper is to provide practical insights and discuss general issues in face-to-face interviewing together with the practicalities of carrying out different type and style of interviews.

The paper starts with a brief description of an interview, advantages and disadvantages, type and style of interviews. It then proceeds with interviewing various techniques issues in interviewing and tips for the interviewers before it ends with the summary of the paper.

What Is An Interview ?

One method of collecting data is to interview respondents to obtain information on the issues of interest. It is sometimes referred to as a 'conversation with a purpose' and usually involves asking people questions or getting their responses and then, recording and analyzing their responses. It can be structured, semistructured or unstructured (free-range) interviews. It can be used as the primary method of collecting data or in combination to other methods such as examination of secondary data and/or participant observation.

Interviews can be conducted at preliminary stage, exploratory study, main data collection stage or after an analysis to corroborate findings obtained during the analysis stage. The main idea is to incorporate the interviewees' perspectives into the findings of a study for future analysis.

Advantages & Disadvantages Of Interviews

Table 1 : Advantage & Disadvantage Of Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A flexible and adaptable way of getting information – interview can offer the interviewer an opportunity to understand the verbal responses and a direction to more interesting issues that previously has not been predicted by changing the line of enquiry as the interview progresses.• A short cut to participant observation – observing how people do and react during a field study and try to understand what they feel is a useful approach but, asking directly can provide you the 'accurate' answers.• The interviewer can clarify doubts and ensure responses are properly understood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geographical limitations• Costly• Respondents might feel uneasy about the anonymity of their responses when they interact face to face with the interviewer

Type And Style Of Interviews – A Distinction On The Degree Of Structure Or Formality

a. Fully structured Interviews

They are interviews with pre-determined set questions asked the responses recorded on a standardized schedule. Same questions will be asked to all respondents. The main purpose is to explore and probe into several factors in the situation that might be central to the broad problem area (Sekaran, 2000, p.225)

b. Semi-structured interviews

These interviews are conducted where the interviewer has worked out a set of questions in advance, but is free to modify their order based upon his perception of what seem is appropriate within the context.

c. Unstructured Interviews

This is where the interviewer has a general idea of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develops. He does not enter the interview setting with a planned sequence of questions to be asked. Only open and broad questions will be asked and the replies would give the interviewer an indication of the individual's perception and direction for further information to be pursued. However, it promotes and enhances co-operation and rapport as it gives certain extent of freedom for the respondent to speak up their opinion on the issues raised. Interviewers must have a good listening skills to enable them tapping critical information in the responses, having grip on the variables that need greater focus and identifying where more information is needed. However, the interviewer might lose control and this information obtained is more difficult to analyze.

Issues In Interviewing

a. Gaining access and getting co-operation

In most cases, the higher the authority of a 'gate-keeper' can make a difference to willingness of the interviewees to participate. Access should be considered beyond getting into an organization and meeting particular managers as it can also be considered from the perspective of accessing the full and honest views of a manager (Nasirin & Birks, 2002, p.258). This might be the most difficult task to do, as it requires careful planning and patience such as getting necessary permission, appointment arrangements, confirming and rescheduling appointments. It also depends on the timing and the 'gate-keeper'. Most of the times, we need to brief the purpose of interview as concise as possible.

In a study in a public hospital by Othman & Bringnall (2004), the gate keeper was a previous officer to the Chief Secretary of the ministry. After being brief about the benefits and purposes of the research, an official letter was secured and this

like a 'passport' to all government department and agencies within the jurisdiction of the ministry. An official letter from Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) as the regulatory body for Malaysian accountant had helped researchers in identifying reasons for UiTM accounting graduates not becoming accountants (Mohd Nasir, Said and Ghani, 2005). In another study by Said, Mohd Nasir and Hashim (2005), being staff members of UiTM had given them a privilege in getting access and undertaking a study in identifying the factors considered as important by UiTM Affiliated Colleges in Choosing Franchisors.

In other cases, the purposes of the interviews must be stated as clearly as possible as the door of opportunity to gain access can be shut as soon as the potential interviewee rejected the idea. As much as possible the interviews should be seen as 'in their favour'. In a study about the current state of charity accounting in Malaysia, one of the team researcher experienced this the moment she asked the accountant whether they had a full set of accounts. We presumed the potential respondent suspecting the researchers trying to audit and look for their flaws even though he knew he had everything in order. The same researcher called another respondent and mentioned that she wanted to know and learn how charity organizations in Malaysia do their accounting and the accountant was the best person to bridge the gap between the theory that she knows and the practicality of the knowledge in his practice. Almost immediate, we got an interview appointment with the respondent.

b. Questions to avoid in interviews

Interview is an opportunity not to be wasted but unnecessary conversation even though it was an unstructured interviews. These are some of the questions and examples that needed to be avoided during an interview.

Table 2 . : Type Of Questions To Be Avoided and Examples

Type of questions	Examples
Long questions : the interviewee may remember only part of the question, and respond to that part.	<p>"What is your understanding of life-long learning?"</p> <p>"Is life-long learning a common practice in our culture?"</p>
Doubled-barrelled (or multiple-barrelled questions)	<p>"what do you feel about your current job and responsibilities of an accountant compared with that of five years ago?"</p> <p>Break it into simpler questions :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "what do you feel about your current job and responsibilities?" • "Can you recall your job and responsibilities five years ago?" • "how do you feel they compare"

Type of questions	Examples
Question involving jargon : keep things simple to avoid disturbing interviewees ; it is your own interest as well.	"has ABC been configured to ERP system in your organization?"
Leading questions	"why do you actively involve in IT implementation in your organization?"
Biased question : provided you are alert to the possibility of bias it is not difficult to write unbiased questions.	:Tioman is the best island in Malaysia to go for holidays. Why do you think so?

a. Question content

A distinction must be made at the outset of whether we are seeking information of what they know or what they do or what they think because this can lead to different kind of questions on fact, behaviours and belief/attitudes. If you are certain with the kind of information that you want then, you know what and how to question the interviewees.

Table 3 : Question Content & Examples

Question Content	Example
Facts are easier to get at, though they were in the past.	"when did you graduate with Degree in Accountancy?"
Behaviours : interviewees must be willing and in 'favourable' position to do so.	"you are an experience accountant, why did not apply for MIA memberships?"
Belief and attitudes: the most difficult data and relatively has become an important agenda in any piece of social science research.	"do you think an accountant has the skills and knowledge to be part of the project implementation team?" Posing the same question, you might get different response and reaction from an accountant and IT department head.

In summary, it is very important that you prevent assumptions being built into questions and influencing interpretation. It is very tempting to lead respondents to give the answers that you want but as a researcher you must keep an open-mind during the interview and be as neutral as can be.

b. Skills and experience of the interviewer

Hiring competent and experienced interviewer has become a trendy approach for large organizations and of course very costly to researchers who want to experience data collection stage on site. Without skill and experience, the researcher might lose important information not incorporated in a pre-set interview question or lose the opportunity to further 'digging' information provided by the interviewee during the interviews. Skilled and experienced researcher know how to motivate, lead or mislead interviewees to uncover the underlying issues investigated. Skills are involved which require practice! Beginner researcher can practice or observe

how the more experienced researcher do an interview vv. A researcher must know when to seek clarification and even though constraint by pre-prepared questions, has should leave some room for flexibility.

In Othman & Brignall (2004), one of the researchers was having the difficulties on her first assignment interviewing finance staff who were female in majority. No one seemed to have time to be interviewed. On one Friday, she was invited to go shopping with the rest of the staff during long break of lunch. Ping! This is the time for ice-breaking and she managed to get lots of information for a start and had built rapport with all female staff in the department. The interviews were mostly “made” informal during breakfast, lunch and tea time. Though, they knew that their conversation were being taped, they just could not be bothered.

c. Length of interviews

It is rather usual not to get any information ‘valuable’ from the person you interviewed during the first half an hour. It can drag up to more than one hour or two hours. There is no specific guideline on how long an interview should be but the best benchmark is when all the answers needed are obtained. This also calls for the skill and experience of the interviewer to plan, manage and close an interview. We do not want to have a very long endless interview with no significant information relevant to our research or issues investigated. An experienced researcher frequently reminded me to ‘read’ the body language to determine when to stop and have a short break or to continue the next day. You must know when to stop an interview nicely. Example, “.....oh I see. I believe you are an experienced accountant. So, tell me what are the most memorable moment in your career?”

d. Interview's devices

Always making sure that your tapes are readily available and sufficient, extra batteries are within reach and you are familiar with the tapes and tape-recorder that you are using. It is wise practice at home and making sure that all the devices are in good condition. It is always a good practice to stand-by few papers just in case the devices are suddenly dead or the interviewees require for the interviews not to be taped for certain reasons at certain point of time during the interview. After few months of having difficulties, a researcher received a phone call informing an opportunity to interview a chief executive director of an organization in Malaysia. Too excited with the interview, she did not check the tape recorder's batteries which were fully utilized in the morning sessions. She did not make notes during the interview because she was too mesmerized with the CEO – an icon in Malaysia – and this led to the unforgettable interview the moment she realized that she could hardly hear the conversation and spent the next two days blaming herself. CHECK THE BATTERIES!!!!

e. Transcription of interviews

Listen to your tapes as soon as you finish an interview, as the conversation is still fresh in your mind. Never procrastinate NO MATTER HOW TIRED YOU ARE! Generally a one-hour tape usually requires ten hours to be transcribed fully providing that the quality of the audio is good (less likely). Else, you might spend endless days and nights in trying to understand your own voice and others. Often, this stage is the 'nightmare' for any researchers transcribing interviews. You must first transcribe 'word' by 'word'. Do not intend to summarize straight away. After listening to the conversation again, you might be able to capture the purpose of the questions and summarize the conversation. Most importantly, do not put your interpretation to the conversation early.

f. Location of interviews

It is very important to ask your potential interviewee where he or she wants the interview to be. The place should be somewhere where he or she is most comfortable, away from his work station, with less noise interference. The best place that we discovered so far was the meeting room. A meeting room with no telephone around is good for an interview and avoid interruption. Constant interruption can impede flow of thought and this will significantly impact the direction and completion of the interview.

Interviewing Techniques – Tips For The Interviewers

An interview is a social interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee. An interviewer must try to get the interviewee to talk and respond without losing focus on the purpose of the interview. The information obtained should be free of bias as possible. Few tips are given below.

A. Things To Do Before The Interview

- i. Study the research objective (purpose) and make a list of information that you want to find out.
- ii. Determine type and style of interviews
- iii. Make list of questions as precise as possible (Crawford, 2002) but leave room for flexibility
- iv. Start constructing questions

B. How To Start An Interview

- i. Be pleasant, dressed appropriately
- ii. Introduce yourself and explain purpose of interview
- iii. Assure confidentiality
- iv. Ask permission to tape and/or make notes
- v. Start with easy and non-threatening questions by selecting questions which are general in nature and non-directive in manner – 'grand tour' questions (Hunter, 2002) as "ice-breaking", to create rapport and put the respondent at ease.

C. How To Proceed With Questions

- i. Cover main purpose of the interview
- ii. Avoid long, double-barrelled, leading biased and questions involving jargon
- iii. If the interviewees are asked to reflect their past experience and knowledge, focus the discussion on current activities, experience and knowledge and followed in reverse chronological order

D. How To Motivate Respondents To Answer

- i. Listen more than you speak – attentively listening to what the respondent has to say and evincing interest in what the respondent has to say.
- ii. Explain the importance of their contributions to the study
- iii. Put questions in a straightforward, clear and non-threatening way
- iv. Never mislead interviewees to respond in a particular way
- v. Familiar with the questions
- vi. Exercising tact in questioning (non-threatening)
- vii. Try to make the interviews less formal
- viii. Show appreciation of the experience of a particular interviewee
- ix. Enjoy it

E. What To Look For In The Answers

- i. Clarification – Listen carefully to understand the responses and ask for clarifications if necessary
- ii. Cue – when to stop, break or change direction. Be prepared if you can not ask the respondents according to the prepared questions
- iii. Coverage – the responses may lead to interesting issues not previously covered by the prepared questions
- iv. Category – are the answers affirmation, validation, confirmation, suggestion etc.

F. How To Close An Interview

- i. Use a few straightforward questions at the end to defuse any tension that might have built up
- ii. Say thank you and good bye
- iii. Say you might contact in the next few days or weeks to run through the transcription with him for validation purposes
- iv. Give token of appreciation for the time spent and information given (if budget permits)

Summary

We proposed that in order to profitably utilizing interviewing techniques, the interviewers must know how to start an interview, how to proceed with the questions, how to motivate respondents to answer, what to look for in the answers and how to close an interview. Researchers do not become good interviewers just by reading about it. Skills are involved which require practice. The tips provided in this paper should become a part of their repertoire for interviewing.

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