

Semi-structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies

Ruslin

Email: ruslin@iainpalu.ac.id

Saepudin Mashuri

Email: saepudinmashuri@iainpalu.ac.id

Muhammad Sarib Abdul Rasak

Email: saribmuh612@gmail.com

Firdiansyah Alhabsyi

Email: firdiansyah_alhabsyi@iainpalu.ac.id

Hijrah Syam

Email: hijrahsyam4586@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to describe how the semi-structured interview is conducted in qualitative research. The main focus of this article is to explain how the interview is employed to obtain in-depth information. Based on these premises, this article discusses two thematically based accounts. First, the semi-structured interview is more powerful than other types of interviews for qualitative research because it allows for researchers to acquire in-depth information and evidence from interviewees while considering the focus of the study. Second, it allows flexibility and adaptability for researchers to hold their track as compared to an unstructured interview, where its direction is not fully considered. This article uses extensive literature reviews related to the methodological reflections of researchers in qualitative research. Hence, the semi-structured interview could potentially enable qualitative researchers to amend their research questions throughout their studies while maintaining their track. The article further suggests that current qualitative researchers are required to be more concerned about how to use semi-structured interviews, especially when robust findings are the main objectives.

Key words: semi-structured interview; research approach; research methodology; and research instrument

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I. Introduction

This article aims to describe how the semi-structured interview as a research instrument is used in qualitative research. The main focus of this article is to disclose some methodological reflections regarding the practicality of the semi-structured interview as one of the main research instruments in qualitative research. This article discusses two thematically based accounts. The first account elucidates that the semi-structured interview is perceived to have more potential than other types of interviews because it allows researchers to acquire in-depth information and evidence from interviewees while seriously considering the focus of the study. The second account concerns its flexibility and adaptability. For many qualitative researchers, the semi-structured interview is perceived to enable researchers to track their studies while being flexible and adaptable to ask questions to their interviewees. The sense of flexibility and adaptability in the semi-structured interview, however, is particularly distinctive from the looseness of an unstructured interview because its direction is fully controlled. Hence, the article takes into account different perspectives and reflections of qualitative researchers, especially regarding the methodological aspects of the interview. The article is, thus, expected to provide a better understanding of how this mode of the interview could appropriately be used in qualitative research which would ultimately help researchers achieve robust research findings.

The Notion of the Interview and Positional Perspectives of Researcher(s)

The interview is roughly defined as an interaction between two people on a particular occasion, where one acts as an interviewer and another as an interviewee. Thus, the interview is defined as an *inter-view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme or a topic of mutual interest (Kvale, 1996).

From a general perspective, the *interview* is a type of conversation between two or more people (the interviewers and the interviewees) where *questions* are asked to obtain information from the interviewees.

As a type of conversation, Kvale (1996) regards the interview as one of many modes of human interaction. Through conversations, we know other people, learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes, and understand the worlds in which they live. There are two types of conversation. The first type is an *everyday conversation* that entails chatting, small talk, exchange of news, disputes, and formal negotiation to deep personal interchanges. This type of conversation is usually informal, where a person or a group of people involved do not necessarily need to initiate a prescribed topic in conversation, as in many research interviews. In this context, the aim of such conversations is mostly to maintain the social relationship of the group.

The second type of conversation, as Kvale (2006) described, is a professional conversation. These conversations range from journalistic interviews, legal interrogations, academic oral examinations, religious confessions, and therapeutic dialogues to qualitative interviews. On many occasions, the latter is used to acquire particular information about a certain group of people or events in a certain period. In this sort of conversation, topic(s) is mostly negotiated so that people engage in mutual fit in the topic(s) to discuss. The main purpose of the conversation is to build up knowledge or information required; therefore, it must be well prepared in advance.

Kvale (1996) regards a qualitative research interview as an attempt to understand the world from the point of view of research subjects. The conversation is aimed to unfold the meaning of their experiences and to uncover their lived world (Sewell, 2009). In contrast to daily conversations, which are usually reciprocal exchanges, professional interviews involve an interviewer who is in charge of structuring and directing questioning (Sewell, 2009). Kvale (1996) stresses that a qualitative interview is based on a conversation in which a researcher asks questions and listens to interviewees at the same time, while respondents (interviewees) answer questions. From this perspective, Kvale implicitly puts a researcher and an interviewee in an equal position. Meanwhile, Sewell (2009) points out that in some professional interviews, such as *job interviews* or *legal interrogation*, the power of the questioner is much greater than that of the interviewee.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) regard qualitative interviews as conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. In this context, the position of researchers is clear because they drive the conversation. For Rubin and Rubin (2005), the direction of a conversation in an interview is in the hands of a researcher.

As Kvale (1996) describes, there are two different perspectives concerning the interview as a common research instrument in qualitative research. First, it approaches the research assuming the metaphor of a *miner*. From this perspective, knowledge is viewed as a buried metal, and an interviewer plays the role of a miner. Kvale (1996) elaborated metaphorically that some miners seek objective facts to be quantified and others simply search for nuggets of essential meaning. This metaphor locates knowledge or information as something to be obtained from research participants. The job of a researcher is only to uncover in-depth information from research participants; therefore, the information is presumed to be uncontaminated (Kvale, 1996).

The second perspective uses the metaphor of a *traveller*. In this context, the interviewer is seen as a *traveller* on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home (Kvale, 1996:4). The interviewer – traveller – wanders through the landscapes and enters into conversations with people they (the researcher) encountered. The conversations between the interviewer and local inhabitants are about the stories of their own living world (conversation as wandering together with). The difference between the first and latter perspectives is in the way they perceive the knowledge and information gathered from interviewees. If the first stresses the objective facts of research subjects, the latter emphasises not only new knowledge but also most likely changes knowledge or information obtained during conversations encountered. The journey of interviewees, as Kvale (1996) illustrates, might instigate a process of reflection that leads the interviewers to new ways of self-understanding. Moreover, it is also used to uncover previously taken-for-granted values and customs in the traveller's home country.

The concluding remarks of the two different perspectives provide a clear picture of the position an interviewer should take. Kvale (1996) argued that the miner metaphor pictures a common understanding in modern social sciences of knowledge as '*GIVEN*'. In contrast, the traveller metaphor refers to a post-modern constructive understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research (Kvale, 1996).

On the other hand, Dunne et al. (2005) regard the interview in its different features as the most flexible research method. They argue that the interview is an adaptable and powerful method in a broad range of research projects. Owing to this nature, a thorough understanding of a researcher about how and why interview technique(s) is applicable to the study is needed. Hence, a researcher needs to understand his or her position in research, whether or not it is articulated, and that interview at the end is a method of generating texts (Dunne et al, 2005).

Semi-Structured Interview and its Methodological Perspectives

The semi-structured interview is a method of research commonly used in **social sciences**. Hyman et al. (1954) describe interviewing as a method of enquiry that is universal in social sciences. Magaldi and Berler (2020) define the semi-structured interview as an exploratory interview. They further explain that the semi-structured interview is generally based on a guide and that it is typically focused on the main topic that provides a general pattern. In addition, Megaldi and Berler (2020) argue that the semi-structured interview, despite its topical trajectories provided prior to the interview, enables a researcher to go deep for a discovery. The literature in anthropology, for example, is one of the products derived from interviews. The interview is mostly used to explore a life story of a person or a group of people. For example, in the literature on Islam, the life story of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was codified in the form of hadiths. Likewise, the life story of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most prominent American politicians, and many more are examples of this type. The semi-structured interview has been widely used in social sciences. The premise is that it is interrelated to the expectation that the viewpoints of interviewees are more likely to be expressed in a reasonably openly designed situation rather than in a standardised type of conversation, as in questionnaires (Flick, 2002; Kohli, 1978). While the structured interview has a formalized, limited set of questions, the semi-structured **interview** on the other hand is flexible, allowing new questions to be brought forward during the interview as a consequence of what the interviewees have said.

In the semi-structured interview, an interviewer generally has a framework of themes to be explored. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 171) suggest that good interviews usually consist of a balance between main questions, follow-ups, and probes. However, a specific topic or topics that an interviewer wants to explore during the **interview** should be well prepared in advance. Many researchers suggest that it is generally beneficial for interviewers to have an interview guide prepared, which is a type of informal grouping of topics and questions that an interviewer would ask in different ways to different participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The guide enables researchers to focus on the topics at hand without constraining them to a particular format. This freedom could help interviewers tailor their questions to the interview context or situation and people being interviewed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Despite variations in style and traditions, the semi-structured interview has peculiar characteristics. Mason (2002) suggests that all such interviews have the following key features. First, the interview is a type of internal dialogue exchange. This means that qualitative interviews must involve one-to-one interactions, large group interviews, or *focus groups*. It may also take place face-to-face, over telephone, or via *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and other types of Internet platforms. Second, the semi-structured interview has a relatively informal style. For example, the interviewer and interviewee(s) engage in a *face-to-face* conversational discussion instead of the formal questions prescribed. Such conversation is called '*conversation with a purpose*' (Burges, 1984).

Third, there is also another type of the semi-structured interview. A thematic or topic-centred, biographical, or narrative approach where a researcher has a number of themes or topics, issues to cover, or a set of starting points for discussions could be one of these kinds. With this approach, a researcher is unlikely to have a complete or sequential script of questions. As it has been well known, qualitative interviews are mostly designed to have a fluid and flexible structure. This allowed researchers and interviewees to develop unpredictable themes alongside interviews.

Fourth, as most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and therefore contextual, the job of an interviewer is to ensure that relevant contexts are brought into focus. Hence, situated knowledge can be produced. From this perspective, knowledge at the very least is reconstructed, rather than facts simply reported in an interview setting. Therefore, Mason (2002) and Kvale (1996) argue that the qualitative interview tends to involve the construction or reconstruction of knowledge instead of just its excavation.

The interview is one of the most common ways and recognised forms of qualitative research methods. Consequently, researchers in some cases include qualitative interviews in their studies without deliberating why it should be selected, what they expect to obtain, or whether any other method would be more appropriate to provide a useful complement (Mason, 2002). In relation to this premise, Mason (2002) suggests that a researcher should ask why to use any of the methods rather than assuming the right choice too soon in the process. In his view, a number of possible reasons may explain why researchers choose the qualitative interview as a method of collecting data. First, the choice of the method is related to the ontological position of a researcher. The position of a researcher depends on the knowledge regarding the research philosophy. More specifically, it is usually based on the belief that knowledge, views, understandings, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of social reality in which their research questions are designed. The humanistic approach (Plummer, 2001) could be one such approach. It could also be in the constitution of language or a discursive construction of social or self (Whetherell, et al, 2001)

Second, the epistemological position of a researcher is another standpoint where the semi-structured interview is selected as a method of data collection. This position allows researchers to have a legitimate or

meaningful way to generate data on the basis of ontological properties. In this context, Mason (2002) argues that researchers should actively develop their self-critical analysis. The premise allows judging how well an interview could provide information regarding research questions, gaining access to the accounts of interviewees and articulations and analysing their language and their constructions of discourses.

Third, besides the epistemological position, most qualitative researchers view knowledge as situated or situational; therefore, the interview is seen as a social situation. When researchers view knowledge and evidence as contextual, situational, and interactional, they should ensure that the interview is contextual as well. According to this premise, researchers should view interviews as something to draw upon and conjure up relevant social experiences or processes in the best possible manner. For example, instead of asking abstract questions, which Mason (2002) terms as a *one-size-fits-all* structured approach, it is better for researchers to give maximum opportunity(ies) for the construction of contextual knowledge while maintaining a focus on relevant and specific experiences of interviewees.

While bias could not easily be avoided in any interview, it is better for researchers to hold certain epistemological assumptions about their interactions. This would allow them to effectively choose the semi-structured instead of the structured interview. This premise implies that bias can be controlled, or even at a certain point, eradicated. This point of view would help researchers realise that in social interactions '*facts*' cannot be easily separated.

The premise could also be a reason for researchers to choose the interview based on researchers' view that *social explanations and arguments* can be constructed in-depth and taking into account nuance, complexity, and roundedness rather than as a type of broad surveys where surface patterns are predominantly considered. For example, if I am interested in studying a particular social organisation, instead of studying the surface of its comparability or superficial analysis such as accounts of a large number of people, it is better for me to go further inside through in-depth analysis in relation to what the organisation is piloted to achieve, how people work inside, and how they run their programmes. Moreover, how this is organisation linked to other organisations is also carefully considered. This requires researchers to have a distinctive approach to comparison, data analysis, and the construction of arguments (Mason, 2002).

The choice to employ the semi-structured interview may also be based on the reflexivity of researchers in the process of data generation. In many cases, researchers seek to examine rather than to be neutral collectors of data. Hence, it is important for researchers to be neutral to better understand their roles during and after their interviews.

The semi-structured interview may further be employed when data feasibility is indistinct. In this circumstance, asking people's accounts, talking, and listening to them is the only way to generate data and information that researchers need. Accordingly, the semi-structured interview is chosen to add an additional dimension to the research. Applying this method could help researchers approach their research questions from different perspectives and lenses. For example, researchers could attempt methodological triangulations in which they might use interview(s) in tandem with another method of data collection to determine how well they corroborate each other. Finally, research ethics and politics may be another reason for selecting semi-structured interviews. From this perspective, researchers believe that interviewees should be given more freedom and control over interview situations than is permitted, as in the '*structured*' approach.

Despite common characteristics of qualitative interviews, semi-structured and ethnographic interviews are different in nature. Drever (2003) explains that in a semi-structured interview, a researcher creates a structure to map topics to be covered and controls the interview to ensure coverage and probe for reasons. In contrast, in an ethnographic interview, it is important to let an interviewee map out the topic; therefore, the main question can be very open. Drever (2003) further argues that in ethnography, instead of probing for reasons of the interviewees, the ethnographer does probing to ensure the understanding and very often repeats the respondent's own language. For example, instead of saying, "*what do you mean by 'fair' in grading system?*" as in the semi-structured interview, a researcher might ask "*is that an example of what you call 'fair' in grading system?*"

The key difference between semi-structured and ethnographic interviews is a common frame of reference. More precisely, a prescribed scheme prior to an interview should make sense to an interviewee, and therefore, the interview can be a single business-like dialogue. In ethnography, however, an interviewer's job is to determine a respondent's frame of reference. This can take time, and the researcher may have to work towards this point slowly over a series of meetings.

Interview in Qualitative Research

When we talk about the purpose of a thing, we deal with who does what to whom, why, and how. Similarly, in interviews in any research, either qualitative or quantitative, we deal with who is involved in such interviews, who conducts the interviews, and to whom they are conducted, why they are conducted, and how they are typically conducted.

In general, an interview is conducted to gather information or data from a particular person or event. The interview must be able to provide useful information about the candidates that might not be available from other sources (Powis, 1998; Abbasi, 1998). For example, if someone wants to know what people understand about unemployment in Brighton and Hove, they might be likely to meet and ask questions to a number of different people on that issue. The people who might be involved in this type of interviews are likely from different backgrounds and positions. They might be city council officers, who work in the human resources or jobseekers division, they may also be the jobseekers themselves or the people in particular agencies specialised in handling the unemployed. However, this is a simple way to find a rough definition of unemployment. In contrast, in gathering data about unemployment in Brighton and Hove, research findings are certainly different from the way we simply want to understand and write it as news in the newspaper. Rather, it requires several deliberate stages.

Mishler (1986) (cited in Holstein and Gubrium, 2001) claims that the purpose of most qualitative interviews is to derive interpretations, neither facts nor laws, from the respondent's talk. He further notes that some frame it as a speech event. In contrast to Mishler (1986), Kvale (1996) emphasises that interviews for research or evaluation purposes may promote understanding and change. Similarly, Sewell (2009) highlights that therapeutic or clinical interviews can lead to understanding and change, although the stress is on the personal change. The expected understanding and change in qualitative interviews focus more on intellectual understanding than on producing personal change.

A decision about whether to use interviews or questionnaires as data collection techniques affects the types of understanding one expects to achieve from his research (Drever, 2003). This means that the data collection technique should be based on the type of information that one wants to cover in the study. For example, those regarding their research mainly as an ethnographic study or a case study are likely to prefer to use interviews (semi-structured interviews) to a questionnaire. In a case study, for example, the researcher does not aim to cover the whole population and determine common factors, but to provide an in-depth picture of a particular area of the educational world; moreover, it may also be chosen because it is relatively self-contained (Drever, 2003). In this sense, what is required to cover in a case study strongly determines the choice of a data collection technique.

In contrast, when a researcher aims to provide a general picture of people's circumstances or opinions across the defined population, for example, what views do the parents have on the introduction of English in primary schools in Indonesia, then, questionnaires are more accountable to achieve that purpose.

Although it has been shown that the decision to use a particular data collection technique is based on the information required to cover in the study, it does not necessarily mean that both interviews (semi-structured interviews) and questionnaires are not possibly applied in one study. According to Drever (2003), because the nature of interviews is an in-depth explanation within a particular context while questionnaires paint a broad though possibly superficial picture, it is often a good idea to use both consecutively. For example, an exploratory survey or a case study using interviews may be used to identify the main issues that can be built into questionnaires. It is also possible to extract from a questionnaire survey to select interesting issues or cases to be followed up in-depth using interviews.

Conducting Qualitative Interviews

How the interviewer documents the content of the interaction with the respondent is a critical issue. There are many approaches that can be used to document the results of the interviews. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of an approach should be considered to result in a reasonable quality of the interview and less time-consuming. Hence, we can list the various options, beginning with the approach that is the most complete and most time-consuming. Each of the following approaches for collecting interview data has advantages and disadvantages.

Good qualitative interviewing represents hard, creative, and active work (cited from Holstein and Gubrium, 1995 in Mason, 2002). According to Mason (2002), planning and carrying out a qualitative task is much more complex and exhausting than developing and using a structured questionnaire to ask predetermined questions. First, it requires a great deal of planning (Mason, 2002).

Conducting a qualitative interview requires a set of skills. With good skills, the interviewer is likely trouble-free to organise what to ask, how to ask the interviewee, and at the same time, how to encounter the information delivered by the interviewee by understanding verbal and non-verbal information, remembering, and absorbing what has been covered while keeping watching points to probe and follow up and taking notes whenever possible. Although such skills are required, it is not necessary to have all the skills when conducting an interview (Drever, 2003; Mason, 2002; see also Hermanns, 2004). What Drever suggests is preparation, rather than improvisation. This means that when someone wants to do an interview, they need to develop a simple schedule and try to keep it, word questions naturally, and use a tape recorder; therefore, they need not depend heavily on interviewing skills. Drever (2003) describes that when beginners experience difficulties, it is

most often because they feel obliged to get involved in the interview. Consequently, the interviewer tends to talk too much and, in turn, starts to draw off the prescribed schedule or starts leading his respondent.

In contrast, some other interviewees obtain excellent interview results because they are conducting an interview as 'minimalist' (Drever, 2003). This means that what they do is loosely use the scheduled main questions instead of tightly following each question during the interviews. Therefore, the interviewers are suggested to better think about how to keep the interview manageable, rather than becoming concerned about general interviewing skills. Therefore, Hermanns (2004) suggests that the interviewer must create space for subjects to reveal different aspects of their personality. Encouraging the interviewee is an important part of the interviews. Encouragement can be verbal and non-verbal, such as a nod, smile, or whatever reply to reduce the tension of the interviewee.

The following are some non-cognitive skills recommended to the qualitative interviewers to have in mind, although it is not necessary to cover them all at the same time during interviews. These non-cognitive skills include the following: verbal communication skills, time management and flexibility, knowledge of the profession, problem-solving and decision-making skills, values and integrity, attitudes, physical appearance including health, speech, and poise perseverance, self-confidence without arrogance (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Hermanns, 2004)

Analysis of the Result of the Interview

According to Drever (2003), to represent the raw data from which the answer to your research questions is extracted, there are three stages required to engage in. The first step is data preparation. In this stage, the interviewer is required to work clean the raw data and put them into a form that is easy to work with. Usually, time is spent on careful preparation. However, good preparation allows researchers to work with the data easily in the later stage, and this is the payoff of repeatedly working over each section of the data collected. For example, transcribing data can be difficult, especially if some expressions are not quite clear; thus, it is necessary to spend more time on them. It is also likely that some of the information might be lost, such as laughter, gestures, body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. In such a situation, the researcher must patiently work over and over again to maintain data sensible. Drever (2006) suggests that to retain nuances of the talk which might be lost, the researcher may use comments or symbols.

Managing data according to their properties is imperative to ensure data manageability while simultaneously retaining as much of the original information as possible and avoiding any distortion (Drever, 2006). If this principle is applied properly, it will make the researcher become familiar with the full range of collected data. Thus, this will allow locating specific materials quickly.

The second step is analysis in which the interviewer is required to try various ways of categorising and reorganising the prepared data and seeking patterns related to the research questions (Drever, 2006). In this stage, categorising, coding, and counting data is performed on the basis of the questions addressed in the research. For example, the data concerning grading derived from students' interviews should be located, coded, and counted separately from grading responses collected from teachers or principles. Reorganising according to the properties of the data is required, such as what research questions match the text being coded or categorised. This will make it easy for the researcher to track where materials come from, from which respondent, and from which interview question.

The final step is to summarise the results. In this stage, the interviewer or researcher uses the patterns to develop conclusions. A variety of approaches can be used. This reflects the flexibility of the semi-structured interview compared to other data collection methods. According to Drever (2006), it could be based on the original structure of the interview in relation to the research questions addressed for the first time, but later, the original structure may be recreated to gain different views. The summary pattern might involve the whole sample, or it might also involve groups or individuals. In summarising, it is possible for the researcher to quantify (using numbers), while ensuring to make a clear-cut category of the data. For example, regarding the pros and cons of a particular statement dealing with grading and mixed responses, the researcher needs to make a judgment about each case.

Similarly, Ritchie and Spencer (1994) argue that qualitative data analysis is essentially about detection. The tasks of defining, categorising, theorising, explaining, exploring, and mapping are fundamental to the analyst's role. The methods functions will vary according to the research question being addressed, and in applied policy research, the following are frequently included:

1. Defining concepts: understanding internal structures;
2. Mapping the range, nature, dynamics, and phenomena;
3. Creating typologies, categorising different types of attitudes, behaviours, and motivations;
4. Finding associations: between experiences and attitudes, between attitudes and behaviours, between circumstances and motivations, etc.
5. Seeking explanations: explicit or implicit;
6. Developing new ideas, theories, or strategies.

Here is an example of the summary of the research studies.

The study	Type	Aims or objectives	Sample	Type of data	Time scale
Talking about sex	Contextual	To explore sexual attitudes and behaviours; to study perceived links between sexual practices and health; To develop issues and clarify language for the survey	40 individuals	In-depth interviews	10 months

Ritchie and Spencer (1994:177)

Ethical and Methodological Issues in Qualitative Interview

In qualitative research, little is ever usually written about the process of analysis at all; little is said about who the analysts are; which particular perspectives they adopt; how are disagreements resolved; whether full transcripts are used; how much is reported; what level of uncodable or unsortable data is tolerable; and what basis is used for filtering data.

(Powney and Watts, 1987).

The quotation depicts how hard is the way social scientists learn from in the data analysis. There are always competing issues dealing with how data are analysed, no matter how experienced the researchers are and how well analysis has been planned. Therefore, according to Arskey and Knight (1999), this phase can take novices as well as experienced researchers longer than expected before the report is finalised and presented.

Some issues may emerge during data analysis. First, it is the issue of the interviewees' judgments hidden from the researcher (subjectivity: interviewer bias). According to Arskey and Knight (1999), in a closed question(s), responses are the results of informants who possibly make judgments about the best fit between their experience and the response categories. This is, of course, hidden from the researcher. It is a very common experience when someone is trying to answer closed questions that categories from which they have to choose often do not match the subtlety of their experiences, beliefs, and feelings, thus attempting to compress that complexity into one simple, ill-fitting category. For example, a closed question such as, - *In the last 12 months, have you visited your doctor? If you have answered 'yes', how many times have you visited?* - simply allows the interviewee to say *yes* or *no* and then choose one of the options that might be matched with what he or she really did. In contrast, considering open-ended questions as in most qualitative interviews, respondent's responses should be clearly deliberated and, at the same time, a good interviewer will have explored it.

Another important issue is the researcher's preconceptions (subjectivity: interviewer bias). In general, most of the time, the researcher comes to the research setting with a particular preconception. In semi-structured interviews, for instance, some guided questions are prescribed before the hand. This indicates that the researcher has set up what to ask the interviewee, although there is room for the interviewee to openly respond to the questions in a free-minded manner. In relation to this issue, Arskey and Knight (1999) argue that in open questions, there is much more scope for collecting data that go beyond the researcher's preconceived notion of how things are likely to be, while in closed questions, the respondent, in general, will simply respond to the researcher's agenda. They further describe the design of the study, which has determined the data which the researcher has collected, and which shape the way in which he will interpret them, reflecting his understanding, preconceptions, beliefs, prejudices, and feelings.

The researcher's judgment is one of the important ethical issues that might influence the quality of the interviews. It is essential to note that the results of the interview should be cross-checked to ensure that the interviewer's judgment does not affect the interpretation of the data. For example, when asking about how the grading system applied in my subject's primary school affects him in terms of his achievement, feelings, and self-esteem among their peers, I have to make sure that I do not make a prejudgment on this matter. To ensure that my personal judgment does not affect the meaning of the data, an inter-observer is required to maintain the reliability of the judgment.

In terms of cause and effect, Arskey and Knight (1999) suggest that connections may be discerned, but without the formal support of statistical analysis, it is an error to do more than *speculate* on possible causal relationships.

Of all ethical issues, Wilson (1996) states that an important set of issues from the social scientist's point of view is concerned with the reaction of human subjects to knowledge (*validity*: extent to which the interview measures what it claims to measure and *reliability*: consistency of the interview) that they are being investigated. This is where the natural science investigation differs from social science views on the subject of the research (in natural science as inanimate objects of investigation). For social scientists, the research subject can change, for example, beliefs and attitudes.

Here are some factors that might affect the contextual accounts of the interviews (critical one).

1. The terms on which the interview has been agreed to are important, for example, respondents' beliefs, opinions, or status; more specifically, what is the legitimacy of the interviewer? Though some offer (sums of money or gifts) to the interviewees as rewards for cooperation, there is very little direct use to the respondents.
2. The interviewing context greatly affects the response rate. Market research interviews often achieve a response rate of less than 50%, mainly through refusal instead of failure to contact the respondent.

3. The perception of the interviewer's characteristics by the respondent, for example, the way interviewees ascribe beliefs and opinions to the interviewer on the basis of visible characteristics such as accent and dress (social class), ethnicity, or gender.

II. Conclusion

Based on the overall presentations, it can be concluded that there are two fundamental reasons why qualitative researchers tend to use the semi-structured interview instead of structured and unstructured interviews. First, the semi-structured interview is more powerful in the sense that it allows the researcher(s), especially in qualitative research, to acquire in-depth information from informants compared to structured interviews. Second, it is flexible and adaptable. At the same time, it holds its direction, especially when compared to the unstructured type of interviews, where its direction is not carefully taken into account. Hence, the semi-structured interview might provide room for researchers to adjust it with their research questions if there is a possible change yet still maintain its directive sense since the main topics to discuss have been prescribed beforehand.

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