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The Scientific Value of the Interview as a Tool for Data Collection in Behavioural Research

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Abstract:
Behavioural research constitutes a fundamental axis aimed at understanding human behaviour. Within this context, the interview emerges as one of the most critical tools for researchers to gather highly accurate and in-depth information on the nature of the research topic and the outcomes sought. This, however, can only be achieved if the researcher possesses a comprehensive awareness and understanding of the interview's concept, design, implementation, and evaluation prior to its application. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the interview as a prominent methodological tool widely employed in scientific research, particularly within the humanities and social sciences. The study seeks to elucidate the concept of the interview and its significance in behavioural studies, outline its fundamental stages, and highlight a set of methodological guidelines and reflective considerations that researchers must observe to ensure the accuracy and coherence of their findings with the study's objectives.

Keywords: behavioural research; scientific research; research tools; interview.

La valeur scientifique de l'entretien en tant qu'outil de collecte de données dans la recherche comportementale

Résumé :

La recherche comportementale constitue un axe fondamental visant à comprendre le comportement humain. Dans ce contexte, l'entretien apparaît comme l'un des outils les plus importants permettant aux chercheurs de recueillir des informations très précises et approfondies sur la nature du sujet de recherche et les résultats recherchés. Toutefois, cet objectif ne peut être atteint que si le chercheur possède une connaissance et une compréhension approfondies du concept, de la conception, de la mise en œuvre et de l'évaluation de l'entretien avant son application. En conséquence, cette étude vise à examiner l'entretien en tant qu'outil méthodologique de premier plan largement utilisé dans la recherche scientifique, en particulier dans les sciences humaines et sociales. L'étude cherche à élucider le concept de l'entretien et sa signification dans les études comportementales, à décrire ses étapes fondamentales et à mettre en évidence un ensemble de lignes directrices méthodologiques et de considérations réflexives que les chercheurs doivent observer pour garantir la précision et la cohérence de leurs résultats avec les objectifs de l'étude.

Mots-clés : *recherche comportementale ; recherche scientifique ; outils de recherche ; entretien.*

Introduction

Human beings have long been the central focus of numerous disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The behaviour of the human subject, in particular, has been the subject of contemplation and inquiry by both ancient and modern thinkers, scholars, and philosophers. Among these disciplines are the behavioural sciences, which encompass, within their scope, anthropology in its various branches and specialisations, psychology with its diverse fields and schools of thought, and sociology with all its subdivisions and the multiple factors it addresses that influence human behaviour. The term behavioural science has come to represent one of the more contemporary expressions in the realm of the humanities and social sciences. Despite its recent emergence, it has attained widespread recognition, lending it an exceptional status and generating heightened expectations regarding its potential contributions.

Research on human behaviour has significantly improved the quality of life for individuals suffering from mental illness and behavioural disorders. It has also contributed to breakthroughs in child development, monitoring organisational culture, and enhancing public health. Behavioural research, a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative methods, aims to measure human behaviour, obtain new data, and analyse the effects of active treatment interventions on human conduct. Consequently, it contributes to developing a comprehensive model for explaining human behaviour and predicting future patterns.

In studying human behaviour, the researcher uses various research tools designed to measure specific responses that

may not be appropriate for assessing other types of reactions. The selection of each tool is determined in light of the research objectives, hypotheses, and the questions the study seeks to answer. It may be necessary to employ more than one tool to collect the required data, especially when gathering information closely related to individuals' opinions, inclinations, or attitudes towards a particular topic. In such cases, the researcher may opt for the interview as a vital technique for uncovering facts directly from their sources.

The interview distinguishes itself from other tools by relying on direct communication and mutual dialogue to collect information. Through the face-to-face interaction it facilitates, the researcher can encourage participants and assist them in delving deeply into the issue under investigation. The success of this process depends on the nature of the target population, the study sample, the researcher's circumstances and capabilities, and their proficiency in managing the data collection tool. Therefore, the researcher must be adequately trained in effective use of the interview and equipped with the requisite knowledge and information regarding its implementation. Otherwise, the value of the interview diminishes, rendering it an ineffective tool for data collection.

In light of this, the interview ,despite the complexities involved in its design and administration ,has become one of the research tools capable of measuring certain attitudes and uncovering the underlying causes of specific human behaviours that may not be measurable or comprehensible through other means. Accordingly, this research paper seeks to explore this tool more closely by addressing the following central research question:

What role does the interview play as a research tool in behavioural studies? What are its types, main stages, and the

considerations that researchers must adhere to ensure its proper implementation and the validity of its results?

1. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the considerable scientific and practical importance of the interview as a research method in behavioural studies. These studies are grounded in three fundamental fields of human knowledge: anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Practitioners in these disciplines are primarily concerned with analysing and interpreting human behaviour, which necessitates a degree of rigour and depth in research. As a method, the interview ensures coverage of critical aspects that support the researcher by collecting reliable, reality-based data. This, in turn, enriches the subject of the scientific inquiry and contributes to achieving its intended objectives.

2. Definition of Study Concepts
2.1. Behavioural Research

Behavioural sciences are defined as a branch of modern science concerned with the scientific study of human behaviour through in-depth exploration of its true nature. The primary focus of behavioural sciences is on human behaviour as it actually occurs rather than how it theoretically or logically ought to be. These sciences prioritise the collection of facts and data regarding individuals' behaviours and actions over prescribing normative behavioural standards.

To achieve this aim, most behavioural scientists concentrate on studying human conduct. While research may sometimes extend to the study of animals, the ultimate objective is to utilise the findings to understand human behaviour better (Mazen & Ibrahim, 2019, p. 13). Behavioral sci-

ences, thus, constitute a set of human sciences that examine how individuals respond to specific situations or stimuli that influence them. These sciences contribute to understanding and interpreting such behaviour and seek to predict the likelihood of its future occurrence. This predictive capability facilitates behaviour regulation, control, and direction (Al-Qadhafi, 2016, p. 8).

2.2. The Interview

In reviewing the literature on scientific research in general and methodology in particular, it is evident that the interview has been attributed with various meanings. The interview is commonly defined as a conversation between the interviewer and the respondent, through which information is collected via direct interaction between individuals. The interview is considered one of the key tools for data collection in scientific research due to the verbal interaction it facilitates between the researcher and the participant, allowing for the acquisition of more profound insights into the phenomenon or case under study (Al-Azzawi, 2017 p. 103).

The interview is sometimes called a "personal test" and is based on face-to-face communication to collect or verify to collect or verify the information. Through this interaction, one can evaluate the general character of the interviewee and identify key traits revealed through their manner of interaction, discussion, and non-verbal emotional expressions (Abd al-Rahman, 2015, p. 42).

Mohammad Obeidat and others define the interview as a directed conversation between the researcher and another individual or individuals intended to uncover a specific truth or situation that the researcher aims to understand to fulfil the study's objectives. One of the main goals of the interview is to obtain the data required by the researcher, in

addition to observing the features, emotions, or behaviours of the interviewees in particular contexts. The interview can be used effectively in illiterate communities and studies involving children (Obeidat et al., 1999, p. 55).

The interview is a research tool used to collect information that enables the researcher to answer the research questions or test the hypotheses. It involves the researcher meeting the respondent face-to-face to pose a series of questions, which the respondent is expected to answer.

2.3. Scientific Research

The term "scientific research" is found to be composed of two words: "research" and "scientific." Linguistically, the term "research" refers to the act of seeking, investigating, or inquiring into a truth or matter. The word "scientific" relates to science, which refers to knowledge, understanding, and the awareness of facts. Science also implies comprehensiveness and a full grasp of information and related matters. Based on this analysis, scientific research can be defined as a systematic inquiry following specific scientific methods and approaches to verify, modify, or add to scientific facts.

Scientific research is a structured endeavour to identify interrelationships among phenomena, events, and variables using a scientific, methodical approach. It seeks to discover new knowledge, validate it, and analyse the relationships among facts and variables that concern humans in various fields. Moreover, it aims to solve the problems individuals face by uncovering facts by analysing precise information, available evidence, and reliable data within the framework of general laws with clearly defined methodologies. These objectives affirm that scientific research is a means to an end ,

a method for achieving goals in an organised manner ,and not an end in itself (Al-Sayyid, 2013, p. 11).

According to Kerlinger, scientific research is "a systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relationships among natural phenomena" (Abrash, 2009, p. 211).

Thus, scientific research is understood to be a structured scientific activity and a method of critical thinking and rigorous inquiry aimed at discovering facts. It relies on objective methodologies to uncover these facts' interconnections and derive general principles and explanatory laws.

3. Behavioural Research and the Importance of the Interview in Achieving Its Research Objectives

The term "behavioural sciences" is considered one of the modern concepts that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its emergence was facilitated by many empirical scientists working in experimental fields who were concerned with establishing a new direction in the humanities. This new approach focused on quantitative measures while safeguarding human beings from the excesses of certain scientists who had reduced the individual to a mere collection of fragmented data and symbols utterly detached from human characteristics. Such reductionism rendered the individual as nothing more than a cog in the wheel of material production.

In response, behavioural sciences emerged as a pressing necessity to understand human behaviour, needs, motives, and its determinants within the context of the social situations that trigger such behaviour. Behavioral sciences are grounded in three core domains of human knowledge: anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Practitioners within these disciplines are primarily concerned with analysing and

interpreting human behaviour across these domains. This includes studying relationships between individuals and groups in work, production, and activity contexts and examining the environment's influence on individual and collective behaviour (Al-Qadhafi, 2016, p. 9).

The study of human behavioural sciences derives its foundations from the principles and concepts of behavioural sciences and related research findings. The scientific study aims to develop models that describe and analyse behavioural sciences in various forms and dimensions. This, in turn, contributes to the development of a comprehensive framework for interpreting human behaviour and predicting future patterns.

Many practitioners in behavioural sciences believe that facts derived from psychological and sociological theories provide essential information about individuals and their behavioural patterns ,whether they are workforce members, producers, investors, shareholders, or consumers. These insights also help understand how individuals influence one another, analyse work-related problems, and design programmes and policies that effectively steer behaviour positively (Al-Qadhafi, 2016, p. 32).

The scientific objective behind studying human behaviour is to arrive at conclusions and generalisations concerning the conduct of individuals and groups, supported by empirical evidence accumulated through impartial and objective research. Behavioural sciences employ scientific research to gather data, acquire information, and formulate scientific laws and theories. The resulting data and information must be collected, organised, classified, and interpreted to derive credible scientific truths (Abd al-Rahman, 2015, p. 44).

Among the tools used to achieve this objective is the interview.

Interviews are considered a primary means of data collection, widely employed by researchers across various fields, as they offer direct interaction between the researcher and the research participants. As the eminent social researchers Hammersley and Atkinson affirm: "The expressive power of language provides one of the most important sources for writing descriptive reports. A key feature of language is its capacity to offer descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations that vary almost infinitely concerning any aspect of life, including language itself."

The interview possesses a distinct character, a form of dialogue between two or more individuals, typically controlled by one person who directs the conversation by posing questions to the other party. Interviews are used to uncover or extract further knowledge by asking questions that span a wide range of contexts. For example, they are employed when assessing an individual for employment, in cases where doctors seek to diagnose a patient's condition, or when therapists ,whether psychological or social ,aim to assist individuals in resolving their problems. Social researchers likewise use interviews to gain deeper insight into what people think, feel, or have experienced (Matthews & Liz Ross, 2016, p. 452).

Since human behaviour is a natural outcome of the interaction between the individual and their surrounding social environment, the fundamental domains of behavioural science previously mentioned can assist the researcher specifically in studying behaviour through the analysis of individual motives, attitudes, and inclinations, as well as by examining the surrounding social environment, with all its com-

plex and interwoven factors, whether material or immaterial, cultural or civilisational (Al-Qadhafi, 2016, p. 10).

4. Types of Interviews
4.1. According to the Number of Respondents
4.1.1. Individual Interview

This type of interview is conducted with a single participant. It allows the respondents the freedom to express their opinions and speak honestly without feeling embarrassed by the presence of others (Abrash, 2009, p. 267).

4.1.2. Group Interview

At times, the researcher organises an interview with a group of participants simultaneously, usually between six and twelve individuals, to facilitate communication and engage them all in the discussion during the interview. This is referred to as a group interview, which is advantageous as it provides more helpful information. When individuals from similar or diverse backgrounds are gathered to explore a particular issue or evaluate a given project, they can cover a broad range of information and offer various perspectives. Additionally, they can assist one another in recalling, confirming, and validating information. Group interviews may also encourage individuals to speak openly and at length, mainly when they see and hear others participating and when they desire to contribute to the ongoing conversation and discussion.

Group interviews are beneficial when conducted with groups such as juvenile delinquents and prison inmates for assessment purposes or to address some social issues within specific institutions or communities. However, several limitations are associated with group interviews. Some individ-

uals may refrain from expressing their views on specific issues, and the group may tend to provide reserved or cautious responses. One person (not necessarily the most informed) or a few individuals can dominate the discussion, preventing others from sharing their perspectives. Furthermore, it becomes difficult to determine whether a given opinion genuinely reflects an individual's personal view or is merely influenced by the group consensus (Al-Azzawi, 2008, p. 144).

4.2. Interviews Based on the Nature of the Questions
4.2.1. *Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interviews*
  ➢ **Semi-Structured Interviews**: These interviews follow a set of interconnected topics or questions prepared for all interviewees. However, these topics or questions may be presented in various ways or different orders, depending on the context of each interview. This format allows the respondent to answer the questions or discuss the topic in their own words.
  ➢ **Unstructured Interviews**: These focus on a broad area of discussion and allow the respondent to speak about the research topic in their way. Both semi-structured and unstructured interviews fall under the category of "non-structured" interviews.

Semi-structured interviews are employed to collect data across various research designs and are particularly associated with qualitative social research. In this context, the researcher is interested in individuals' experiences, behaviours, and perceptions and in understanding how and why they interpret social life in specific ways. The researcher is concerned with the participants' information regarding the research topic and how they speak about their experiences and attitudes. In other words, the researcher is attentive to

the dialogue content during the interview, how the respondents express themselves specifically, and the language and words they use (Matthews & Liz Ross, 2016, pp. 455–456).

4.2.2. Structured or Programmed Interview

This type of interview involves questions, and the researcher predetermines the sequence of the questions. Consequently, the same questions are asked in each interview, usually following the same order. The researcher typically works from a list of questions or topics to be discussed and endeavours to adhere to this list. However, this does not preclude the researcher from posing unplanned questions should the need arise or if a respondent's answer raises important new queries.

Structured interviews may have questions designed with fixed responses or variables ,where the researcher provides the participant with a selection of options from which to choose ,or they may be open-ended, allowing the participant the freedom to use their own words, expressions, and style to respond. This type of interview is characterised by the speed with which it can be conducted and the ease with which its responses can be categorised and analysed (Obeidat et al., 1999, p. 57).

4.3. Interviews According to Their Subject Matter
4.3.1. Non-Directed Interview

In this type, the researcher proposes a general topic to the respondent and poses open, unrestricted questions. The researcher only intervenes to stimulate or encourage the respondent, such as by clarifying word meanings or explaining the purpose of the question. In other words, the researcher does not formulate specific questions in advance.

Instead, the interview follows broad outlines that guide its course, allowing for significant flexibility and deviation from a rigid structure (Hamidsha, 2012, p. 102).

4.3.2. Semi-Directed Interview

Here, the researcher has prior knowledge of certain aspects of the topic and seeks further clarification from the respondent. The interviewee is invited to respond in detail using their own words and style. The researcher may pose follow-up or clarifying questions to encourage the participant to elaborate on a specific part of the topic. Semi-directed interviews are typically used to explore a particular area in depth or to verify developments in a previously studied field.

5.3.3. Directed Interview

This format consists of open-ended yet structured questions, prearranged and asked in the same order to all interviewees (Abrash, 2009, p. 268).

5.4. Interviews According to Their Purpose

Interviews are categorised based on their intended goal into four types: survey, diagnostic, therapeutic, and advisory.

- **Survey Interviews** are widely used in social and educational research to understand opinions, attitudes, orientations, and other variables. They are instrumental in surveying employee and worker attitudes and serve as a communication tool between organisational staff and management. They are also employed to address workplace problems and perform various supervisory functions.

Teachers use diagnostic interviews with their students, psychiatrists with their clients, physicians with their patients, etc. Such interviews aim to identify an individual's problems, understand the underlying causes, and determine the severity of the issues.

Therapeutic interviews are intended to resolve individual or group problems. One of the most common forms involves interviews between psychological specialists or educators and students to help individuals relearn healthy coping mechanisms, address their problems effectively, and overcome anxiety and emotional tension.

The purpose of **advisory interviews** is to help individuals understand their strengths and weaknesses ,whether in personal, professional, or educational aspects ,as well as their interests and attitudes. These interviews form the foundation of educational and vocational guidance in education. They also aim to help individuals understand and confront their challenges and obstacles through scientifically sound approaches (Abd al-Rahman, 2015, pp. 42–43).

4.5. The Interview Team Method

The interview team method is one of the modern approaches used in interviews. Two individuals conduct and manage the interview and guide the discussion with the respondent. This method allows the research team to record everything discussed during the session. One interviewer records the respondent's answers, while the other focuses on leading the discussion. This makes the interview more dynamic, engaging, and productive. Additionally, this approach enhances the objectivity of the findings and their interpretation.

It is worth noting that the interview team method is particularly beneficial in exploratory studies that aim to identify variables related to a given subject. The involvement of more than one interviewer facilitates the isolation and identification of these variables due to the exchange of viewpoints and the discussions between the interviewers regarding the topic (Al-Azzawi, 2008, p. 146).

4.6. Telephone Interview

In addition to the previously mentioned data collection methods, other approaches, such as the telephone interview, are less commonly used in most developing societies. This method is typically limited to contexts where telephone access is widespread among the targeted population and where the data sought are limited in scope, particularly in surveying respondents' opinions regarding a specific social phenomenon (Al-Baldawi, 2007, p. 38).

5. When Is the Interview the Most Appropriate Tool?

Specific criteria and considerations may assist the researcher in determining the appropriateness and feasibility of using the interview for collecting essential research data. Among the most significant of these are the following (Al-Assaf, 1995, p. 392):

5.1. Sample Size

If the sample size is large, interviews may not be feasible due to the considerable time and effort required, which may exceed the researcher's capacity and resources.

5.2. Availability of Alternative Tools

Suppose other data collection tools can be used based on the nature of the research problem. In that case, conducting

interviews may be unnecessary, as they often involve more complexities and challenges than other methods.

5.3. Nature of the Sample

If the sample includes individuals for whom other tools are challenging to apply ,such as children or illiterate participants ,interviews may be the only suitable option.

5.4. Type of Information Required

Suppose the required information is sensitive or confidential. In that case, respondents may feel uncomfortable recording their answers in writing, or if it is difficult to formulate the required data as written questions, the interview is the more appropriate method to employ.

All of this is summarised by Kerlinger (1973), who stated: "When deciding to use the interview as a tool for collecting data related to research questions, the researcher must ask themselves the following question: Is it possible to obtain the same information using a method that is simpler and better than the interview?" This is because conducting interviews involves several challenges, such as concerns regarding the validity of the information, interviewer bias, and the level of the interviewer's training in the preliminary study of the questions, among others (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 480).

He adds, "When it is difficult to obtain information by any means other than the interview, and when there is a need for in-depth exploration of the data, the interview becomes the most appropriate tool... Likewise, when the research field is new, the interview becomes essential to develop hypotheses, identify variables, and uncover items that may not yet be known to the researcher. Finally, the interview becomes necessary if the research is being conducted with children who

cannot provide information by other means" (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 488).

From this, we can conclude that Kerlinger added a crucial point, which may be considered among the key criteria and considerations guiding a researcher's decision on whether to conduct an interview. This point is particularly relevant when the research field is novel, and the researcher's understanding of it is limited. In such cases, interviews are necessary to generate new hypotheses, identify relevant variables, and uncover items that might otherwise remain unknown to the researcher.

6. Steps for Conducting the Interview

Once the researcher determines that the interview is the most suitable and effective tool for collecting the information needed to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, the following steps should be followed in its implementation:

6.1. Defining the Objectives of the Interview

The researcher must determine what they aim to achieve from the interview. This requires translating the research questions into measurable objectives, each of which can be assessed through a set of questions. To accurately identify all objectives and supporting questions, the researcher should consult the following:
- Previous studies
- Books and references related to the topic
- Experts and specialists in the field
- Their own scientific and research experience
- (Hamidsha, 2012, p. 103)

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6.2. Identifying the Individuals to Be Interviewed

The researcher must define the study's target population and select a representative sample that serves the study's purposes. The selected individuals must be willing to provide the required information and cooperate with the researcher.

6.3. Formulating the Interview Questions

This stage requires the researcher to be fully prepared to pose appropriate questions to yield the desired information. The questions must meet the following criteria:

➢ They should be clear, understandable, and specific.
➢ They must be neutral, avoiding any suggestion of a preferred answer.
➢ They should be comprehensive, covering all aspects of the subject or problem.
➢ Overly detailed, overly complex, or excessively personal questions should be avoided.
➢ The manner and sequence in which the questions are asked should be carefully planned.

When designing the interview guide ,which includes all potential questions for the interviewee ,it should encompass everything the researcher aims to learn in alignment with the research problem. The guide should consist of a set of primary and secondary open-ended questions structured around the conceptual analysis conducted in the initial phase. It should be organised logically and contain clear introductory information, including a written introduction to the interview itself ('Aishur et al., 2017, p. 334).

6.4. Selecting the Time, Duration, and Location of the Interview

The interview timing should be convenient for both the researcher and the respondent. Ideally, it should align with the respondent's preferred time, as this psychological moment may be the most suitable for conducting the interview. The duration should be sufficient to allow for a thorough exchange; interviews typically last between 30 and 60 minutes, with an average of approximately 45 minutes. It is important to note that rushed or hurried interviews rarely yield the intended results (ʿAishur et al., 2017, p. 334).

The researcher must also determine the interview location. It is advisable to conduct the interview away from the respondent's workplace whenever possible, as this ensures a quieter, more relaxed environment. If the interview must take place at the workplace, it is preferable to conduct it outside of working hours (Obeidat et al., 1999, p. 148).

6.5. The Pilot Study

After designing the interview guide, the researcher must verify that the guide and its questions are fit for use and that the interviewer personally possesses the necessary skills to conduct the interview effectively before implementation. This process involves two simultaneous steps: conducting a **pilot study** of the guide and **training the interviewer** on how to conduct the interview. This can be done by applying the interview to a limited number of individuals who meet the criteria of the target sample.

To achieve the aims of the pilot study and interviewer training, it is recommended that the interviewer employ tools to assess their performance ,such as a video recording of the interview session. Reviewing the recording can help

the interviewer identify weaknesses to address and strengths to reinforce.

Additionally, the pilot study ensures the clarity and appropriateness of question-wording, the linguistic interpretation of terms, and the questions' relevance to the intended objective. It also helps assess the interviewer's ability to manage the interview effectively and avoid situations that may be embarrassing for either party, which could, in turn, affect the credibility of the research findings (Al-Assaf, 1995, p. 397).

6.6. Scheduling the Interview in Advance

The researcher must arrange the interview appointment with the participant and inform them of the topic beforehand, primarily if the respondent must provide documents or records (ʿAishur et al., 2017, p. 334).

6.7. Conducting the Interview

When conducting the interview, the researcher should contact participants early to arrange an appointment. To initiate the interview, the researcher must speak in a confident and steady tone ,for example, saying: "*I would like to take a few minutes of your time for a critical study*" rather than "*May I come to interview with you?*" The interviewer must introduce themselves, present their credentials, and briefly explain the purpose of the study in one or two sentences. It is crucial to reassure participants that their responses will be kept confidential and that their participation is voluntary. This introduction should take no more than one minute. The interviewer should avoid using complex or grandiose language or giving unnecessary details unless explicitly asked.

During the interview, the interviewer must strictly adhere to the questionnaire text, reading the questions exactly as written, without paraphrasing, to make them more conversational. Interviewers must not rearrange the order of questions or skip any ,even if a question appears to have been answered previously. Any questions raised during training must be addressed before the interview sessions occur.

The interviewer should not complete the participant's sentences or offer brief, leading responses. Instead, they must probe for deeper, more comprehensive answers, encouraging participants to reflect and elaborate (Bhattacharyya, 2015, p. 231).

Respondents often provide incomplete, unclear, or inadequate answers during an interview. In such instances, the interviewer must employ **probing techniques**, the primary goal of which is to elicit responses that fully address the intent of each question. Neutral probing methods, referred to as *probes*, include the following (Nouri, 2017, pp. 319–321):

➢ **Silent Probe**:

Though seemingly simple, timely and well-executed, silence from the interviewer can be one of the most effective and neutral means of encouraging the respondent to elaborate on their answer. Inexperienced interviewers may feel discomfort when using this technique, fearing that the respondent will interpret their silence as a sign of incompetence or failure to manage the interview. Others may worry that the silence will embarrass the respondent, making them feel as though they are incapable of answering. The distinction between a productive silent probe and an awkward silence lies in the interviewer's demeanour and behaviour. Silence is a supportive and encouraging tool when the interviewer appears confident and anticipatory, signalling their expectation of further detail. Nonverbal cues such as nod-

ding or facial expressions can reinforce this, conveying encouragement and attentiveness without interruption.

➢ **Overt Encouragement Probe**:

This technique involves brief affirmations from the interviewer that signal awareness and interest in the respondent's answers, indicating acceptance of the responses given so far and a desire to hear more. This form of probing includes verbal cues such as *"yes"* or *"I see"* and non-verbal gestures such as nodding. Combining overt encouragement with the silent probe is often effective in creating a supportive environment that motivates the respondent to elaborate.

➢ **Elaboration and Clarification Probe**:

This technique involves posing neutral follow-up questions or clarification prompts to obtain more accurate or complete answers. Examples include:

- o *What do you mean by that?*
- o *Could you tell me more about this?*
- o *Can you share what is on your mind?*
- o *What are the reasons for that?*
- o *Can you explain why you feel that way or hold that belief?*

➢ **Repetition Probe**:

Sometimes, the interviewer can probe the respondent by repeating all or part of what was previously said. Often, the respondent interprets this repetition as a subtle request for additional information. It is important to note that probing is only effective when conducted neutrally. If the probing lacks neutrality, it may lead to bias, distortion, or the unintentional steering of the respondent toward specific answers.

Example of Neutral Repetition Probe

Interviewer: What is the amount and source of your annual income?

Respondent: My income from real estate is $10,000 per month.

Interviewer (neutral repetition probe): You said your income from real estate is $10,000 per month.

Respondent: I earn about $5,000 annually from farming and around $6,000 annually from a pension.

Example of Non-Neutral Repetition Probe

Interviewer: Do you read any magazines regularly?

Respondent: Yes, a few.

Interviewer: What are the names of those magazines?

Respondent: I remember *Al-Manhal* and *Al-Yaquza*; let me think more.

Interviewer (non-neutral repetition probe): You mentioned *Al-Manhal* and *Al-Yaquza*. What do you think of *Al-Arabi* and *Al-Majalla*? Do you read either of those?

In this case, the interviewer introduces *Al-Arabi* and *Al-Majalla* by name, excluding other possible magazines. This makes the probe **non-neutral**, as it may steer the respondent's attention and influence their answer.

Bhattacharyya refers to this final type of probing as **reflection and mirroring**, which he explains as follows:

> "Here, the interviewer may try the therapist's trick of repeating what the participant says. For example, 'What I hear you saying is that you found this experience extremely painful' and then pause, allowing the participant to elaborate further" (Bhattacharyya, 2015, p. 231).

Regarding the relationship between the researcher and the respondent, several considerations must be observed during the interview process:

➤ The researcher should choose their attire and mannerisms carefully, aligning with the respondent's temperament and preferences.

➢ The researcher should speak naturally and avoid pretentious language, using correct and comprehensible language appropriate for the respondent.

➢ The researcher must avoid topics that could embarrass the respondent or are unrelated to the purpose of the interview.

➢ The researcher should accept the respondent's statements and refrain from arguing or expressing doubt about the respondent's information.

➢ The researcher should ensure the respondent feels free to answer or decline to answer any question.

➢ The researcher must not offer unsolicited advice or present themselves as an authority figure or superior.

➢ The researcher should avoid leading questions and not be biased toward any particular opinion.

➢ (Abrash, 2009, p. 267)

6.8. Verifying the Accuracy of Information Obtained by the Researcher

The researcher must pay particular attention to the accuracy of the information gathered during the interview. There are several potential sources of error, such as mishearing or misinterpreting responses, the tendency of many individuals to exaggerate or provide imprecise and subjective statements, or even deliberate deception. The researcher must, therefore, remain vigilant.

If the researcher wishes to verify the accuracy of an objective fact, they may inform the respondent that this fact will be cross-checked using other sources. This approach has the added benefit of encouraging the respondent to be more precise and cautious in answering subsequent questions.

It may also be helpful for the researcher to allow the respondent to explain their answers further or to provide qualified or tentative responses. In some cases, the researcher should rephrase the respondent's answer in their own words and then ask the respondent to confirm whether this understanding is accurate and complete.

A skilled researcher makes a deliberate effort to distinguish between **objective facts** and **personal interpretations** and assess whether such facts are being presented through the subjective lens of the researcher or the respondent. If a response includes percentages or fractions, the researcher should ideally convert them into numerical figures and present them to the respondent for confirmation of their accuracy.

For instance, if a respondent claims they spend a quarter of their time replying to client correspondence, the researcher might ask, *"Does that mean you spend two hours a day writing letters?"* In doing so, the respondent may recognise and correct an error in their estimation.

In many interviews, obtaining a **summary of responses** may also be preferable. The researcher can prepare this summary and present it to the respondent to confirm its accuracy and ensure it reflects what was said.
(Gharaibeh et al., 1977, p. 49)

6.9. Recording the Interview

The respondent's answers may be recorded **during**, in real-time, or **after** the interview. Recording responses as the interview progresses has the following advantages:

- ➤ It reduces the risk of forgetting important details that occurred during the interview.

➢ Emotional cues and facial expressions from the respondent may be significant and are difficult to recall accurately if not noted immediately.

However, real-time recording also presents several disadvantages:

➢ The researcher may struggle to maintain eye contact or demonstrate attentiveness, potentially affecting rapport.

➢ The respondent may feel restricted or uncomfortable, leading them to withhold information or avoid offering complete responses.

To mitigate these drawbacks, **audio recording devices** may be used to document the interview. However, this approach is not without criticism. Respondents may react negatively to being recorded, becoming overly cautious in their responses. Additionally, recordings do not capture nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or body language.

Despite these concerns, the main **advantages** of using recording devices include:

• Capturing all of the respondent's statements in full, thus reducing the likelihood of omissions or errors.

• Allowing the researcher to concentrate on the conversation, follow up with probing questions, and maintain a natural interaction without the distraction of note-taking.

• (Obeidat et al., 1999, p. 61)

It is helpful at this point to review some of the common **mistakes researchers make when documenting interviews**. If the interviewer fails to recognise, underestimate or ignore a significant incident, they commit what is known as a **confirmation error**. They are guilty of a deletion error if they omit a crucial fact, expression, or experience**. This is an ad-**

ditional error if the researcher exaggerates or expands on a respondent's answe**r**.

Furthermore, if the interviewer forgets the respondent's exact words and replaces them with alternative phrasing that may carry different implications, this constitutes a **substitution error**. Lastly, if the researcher fails to remember the sequence of events or the relationships between facts, they make a **reordering error.**

Given how easily such mistakes can occur, **accurately and promptly recording data and information** must be strongly emphasised (Gharaibeh et al., 1977, p. 51).

6.10. Concluding the Interview

It is essential to conclude the interview with **care, sensitivity, and politeness**, as well as in a spirit of **trust, friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect** so that the respondent feels that their contribution to the research and society more broadly is appreciated and valued. Often, the interviewer ends the session with a prepared closing statement rehearsed in advance (Soteriou, 2017, p. 479).

After the interview concludes, the researcher is encouraged to conduct a **reflective interview**, a self-assessment and an evaluation process. As noted by Bob Matthews and Liz Ross, since the interviewer is the primary instrument for collecting data directly from respondents, they can also collect insights from their own experiences. Therefore, after each interview, the researcher should spend time reflecting on the interview in two ways (Matthews & Ross, 2016, p. 475):

1) **Record your observations about the respondent:** How did the respondent appear to feel about the interview?

Did the respondent express emotions through non-verbal actions, such as hand gestures or facial expressions?

2) **Record your reflections about yourself as the interviewer:**
   - What surprised you?
   - What aspects of the interview structure and your approach were efficient?
   - What did not work as expected?
   - What might you do differently next time?
   - What are your interpretations and analytical thoughts at this moment?
   - What information have you uncovered? What still needs clarification? Consider reviewing these points with the respondent.
   - Do you wish to revise your interview guide?

7. Advantages and Limitations of the Interview

- **The Richness of Information and Data**:

   Due to the number of responses and subsequent elaborations obtained from participants, interviews are considered one of the most effective tools for collecting scientific data. They provide researchers with a wealth of detailed information, both qualitative and quantitative.

- **Suitability Across All Social Categories**:

Interviews are highly adaptable and can be conducted with a wide range of population groups, including:
   - Mentally and physically healthy individuals
   - Educated and professional respondents
   - Individuals with mental, physical, or psychological conditions
   - Behaviourally or morally deviant groups

o Peaceful or high-risk individuals
  o Men, women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and even those with atypical behaviours
  o This broad applicability makes interviews particularly valuable for expanding the reach of data collection and enhancing the comprehensiveness of the gathered information.

➢ **Use as a Diagnostic Tool**:

Beyond their use in social surveys for information gathering, interviews can also serve **diagnostic and therapeutic purposes**. By observing respondents' behaviours, emotions, and reactions during the interview, researchers can obtain accurate insights into their conditions and challenges. This diagnostic aspect makes the interview a powerful tool, mainly when working with patients or deviant individuals, allowing researchers to assess and provide appropriate interventions tailored to each case (ʿInayah, 2014, p. 151).

7.2. Limitations of the Interview

➢ **Time and Effort Intensive**:

Conducting interviews requires a significant investment of time and energy from the researcher, especially when the study involves many participants or when each interview is lengthy.

➢ **Accessibility Challenges**:

Specific individuals, such as high-ranking officials (e.g., ministers or directors), may be difficult to access for face-to-face interviews, and conducting interviews with high-risk or dangerous groups may expose the researcher to potential threats.

➢ **Psychological Influence**:

The outcome of an interview can be affected by the psychological state of either the researcher or the respondent. If either party is not in a favourable mental condition during the interview, this may compromise the quality and accuracy of the data. In contrast, with a questionnaire, the respondent can choose the most suitable time to respond.

➢ **Bias**:

Interviews are susceptible to interviewer bias. The interviewer's attitudes, tone, or assumptions may influence how questions are posed or interpreted, affecting the respondent's answers.

➢ **Loss of Anonymity and Confidentiality**:

Interviews offer a lower level of anonymity compared to questionnaires. The interviewer typically knows the respondent's identity, place of residence, type of housing, family circumstances, and other personal details, which may make respondents more reserved or cautious.

➢ **Sensitivity**:

Interviews are generally less suitable for discussing highly sensitive issues. Many people prefer to write their answers to sensitive questions rather than respond orally face-to-face (Soteriou, 2017, p. 494).

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that the interview plays a vital and effective role when employed as a data collection tool in behavioural scientific research. It offers access to a substantial volume of information that few other tools can provide, particularly in gathering personal and sensitive da-

ta and accessing the deeper layers of emotions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. Thanks to their direct contact with the source, the researcher can adapt the interview context to obtain accurate and precise information.

However, using this tool is far from straightforward. It is not a simple or linear process in which the respondent freely provides all the information required for each question. As previously discussed, responses are influenced by various contextual factors that may affect the answers' content and truthfulness. These factors include the nature of the topic, the interviewer, and the interview setting.

Therefore, the researcher must possess a high level of skill to grasp the key dimensions of the research topic, ensure comprehensive coverage, and ultimately arrive at the intended findings and research objectives.

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