

# Chapter 10

## Testing the Content Validity of Questionnaires: The Role of the Think- Aloud Protocol

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores the application of the think-aloud protocol as a validation tool for assessing the content of research tools, a questionnaire as an example. This validation technique involves participants verbalizing their thoughts while completing a task. The chapter offers a practical example of the use of the think-aloud to enhance the content of a questionnaire on Tunisians' attitudes towards the uses of English, the reasons behind using English, and the promotion of the status of English in higher education. The results revealed several issues in word choice, sentence structure and question formulation demonstrating that the think-aloud protocol can be effectively used to refine questionnaire content.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Validity is a fundamental aspect of research methodology, playing a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy and meaningfulness of research tools. Among the various validation tools documented in the literature, the think-aloud protocol referring to

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a verbal reporting method to verify the accuracy of data collection tools, including questionnaires, before they are administered to the target study participants.

The aim of this chapter is to show the role of the think-aloud protocol in validating the content of a questionnaire concerning the perceptions of Tunisian teachers and students regarding the uses of English, the reasons behind using English and the promotion of its status in higher education. The chapter begins with presenting this validation method and reviewing the existing literature on its application. Then, it introduces the questionnaire, detailing its design process and structure. Finally, the results of the validation process are presented.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section begins with a presentation of the conceptualization of the think-aloud protocol. It subsequently introduces its two primary types: retrospective and concurrent. Following this, the advantages and limitations of these methods are highlighted. The section concludes with a review of studies conducted on the think-aloud protocol.

## **THINK-ALLOUD PROTOCOL**

The think-aloud protocol has its origin in psychological research, evolving from the older introspection method. Introspection involves the observation of events in one's consciousness. Early studies by Ewert and Lambert (1932) and Katona (1940) investigated the effects of experimenter-provided verbalizations on participants' task performance. The think-aloud protocol is defined as "a technique in which students verbalize their thoughts as they read and thus bring into the open the strategies they are using to understand a text" (Oster, 2001).

In addition to its application in assessing learners' performance, the think-aloud protocol is used as a validation tool for testing the content validity of questionnaires. This method entails participants verbalizing their thoughts while filling in the questionnaire to identify its weaknesses and consequently improve it (Gass and Mackey, 2000, p.13). For the purpose of this research, the think-aloud method was adopted as the primary methodology to assess and enhance the accuracy and meaningfulness of a questionnaire.

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