Chapter 11
Member Checking as a Validation Tool

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ABSTRACT

Member checking (MC) is often reported as a tool used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. It is described as a continuous process during data analysis. This chapter explores the application of MC to validate the reliability and credibility of interview transcripts. It provides a practical example aiming to test the authenticity of transcripts of an interview schedule on Tunisian teachers' attitudes towards promoting the status of English in higher education and using it as a language of instruction. The findings reveal that participant validation contributes to verifying the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the credibility of the results.

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research entails in-depth interpretations (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which require continuous reflection by involvement participants in the research process (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Member Checking (MC) is a robust tool that can enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research and ensure that the data are reflective of the participants' authentic experiences.

This study describes how participant validation can be incorporated in the research process and used to verify the accuracy of data. The chapter first conceptualizes MC and presents its process. Then, it presents a review of existing literature on MC. To show how participant validation can be incorporated into the research process, the

chapter introduces the results of a study on verifying the accuracy and credibity of interview transcripts.

MEMBER CHECKING: DEFINITION

Several definitions of MC has been provided. Member checking is known as 'respondent validation' which aims to provide an opportunity for the interviewees to revise and comment on their transcribed interviews (Anderson, 2010). Interestingly, Tracy (2010) provides another equivalent to MC: 'member reflections' arguing that "[...] because the labels of member checks, validation, and verification suggest a single true reality, I instead offer the umbrella term member reflections-which may be applicable to a wider range of paradigmatic approaches" (p. 844).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) see this method as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Similarly to Lincoln and Guba (1985), Elo et al. (2014) see that the aim of this tool is to provide credibility to the collected data. Lincoln and Guba (1986) further describe MC as:

The process of continuous, informal testing of information by solidifying reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out and to the constructions offered by other respondents or sources, and a terminal, formal testing of the final care report with a representative sample of stakeholders. (p. 77)

MC is a tool used to establish the validity of research methods in which data and interpretations are tested with members from whom the data were originally obtained. It involves presenting data transcripts to participants of the study for comments and feedback (Varpio et al., 2017). This means that the participants are involved in the research process (Birt et al., 2016).

MC is seen as a method of rigor to "[ensure] that the participants' own meanings and perspectives are represented and not curtailed by the researchers' own agenda and knowledge" (Tong et al., 2007, p. 356). It can be used to check if the researcher identify correctly the meanings that the participants want to reveal. Cho and Trent (2006) clarify MC process stating it is "a process in which collected data is 'played back' to the informant to check for perceived accuracy and reactions" (p. 322).

Although MC is a useful tool to check the accuracy of results and interpretation, Hallett (2013) points to one of its limitation, stating that it "has become part of qualitative research courses and discussions of 'best practices' without much theorizing concerning how participants experience this practice" (p. 29). This argument reveals the absence of evidence about the experience of the participants. I

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