

Chapter 7

Semi-structured Qualitative Interview Guide: Process and Considerations for Doctoral Students

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explains how to develop semi-structured qualitative interview guide for a doctoral research project. Semi-structured qualitative interviews (SSQIs) combine the use of predetermined thematic open questions with a flexible approach to, in the interview, how they are ordered or phrased. Such flexibility gives the researcher opportunities to probe participants for further clarification, and to explore specific themes. In view of the exploratory nature of semi-structured qualitative interview, the chapter explains the importance for doctoral students to clearly set out the philosophical stances that underpin their research project and the ethical questions pertinent to their research. The chapter addresses the interview guide, particularly how it may be used to overcome challenges researchers might encounter during the data collection process. Within these areas, methodological rigor in commencing a research project is discussed to support doctoral students' growth as semi-structured qualitative researchers.

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INTRODUCTION

Semi-structured qualitative interview is a data collection method that relies on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework formatted for a qualitative study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that such a qualitative method can be used to understand any phenomenon that little is known. It seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and draws attention to processes, meanings, and patterns (Bell et al.; 2023; Bercht et al., 2024). It also pursues more in-depth information that may be difficult to discover or convey quantitatively.

Qualitative research data is enriched with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world and 'may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience' (Stake, 1995), therefore, more meaningful. Accordingly, it has been conducted in different disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, political science, business management, education, and economics, for many decades. Its methodology is concerned with the theory, method, and conceptualization of procedures. Qualitative research and the doctoral students who apply it want to go beyond the concrete details of methods of data collection and analysis.

There are several types of qualitative interviews, ranging from unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2022; Crabtree et al, 2023). However, this chapter focuses on qualitative semi-structured interviews because of its standardization of themes and interview questions alongside a certain degree of openness from participants' responses. It permits interviews to be focused while giving the researcher the autonomy to explore pertinent ideas that may come up during the interview, which can further enhance understanding of the core research issues (Bercht et al, 2024). Furthermore, semi-structured qualitative interviews are suitable for examining uncharted territory with unknown but potential momentous issues, and participants need maximum latitude to spot useful leads to pursue them. It is more likely to draw out richer data than structured interviews (Lichtma, 2023).

Nonetheless, quantitative researchers regard the data obtained through semi-structured qualitative interviews as "unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 12). In addition, the nature of semi-structured interviews might lead the researcher to ask leading questions, which can influence participants' answers. To quantitative researchers, interviews are considered nothing more than casual everyday conversations. However, in comparison with everyday conversations or philosophical dialogues, which usually place participants on an equal footing with the researcher, qualitative interviews can be characterized by an asymmetry of power in which the researcher oversees the questioning of voluntary participants.

It may seem that everyone can simply ask questions, but interviews conducted in a casual manner with little preparation could yield disappointing results (Bercht et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2021). Therefore, conducting semi-structured qualitative

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