

ECAD7004: Researching the Learning: what, how and why am I teaching?

Session 9



Focus Group Interview

Interviews

- ▶ A discussion with someone in which you try to get information from them
- ▶ Three sub-types:
 - ▶ Structured
 - ▶ Unstructured
 - ▶ Semi-Structured
- ▶ Involves establishing rapport
- ▶ Consider when to ask open-ended, closed, and probing questions
- ▶ Record data in transcripts



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-VhzWKaHB4>

Semi-structured Interviews

- ▶ Positive points?
- ▶ Negative points?

Semi-structured Interviews

Strengths

- ▶ Positive rapport between interviewer and interviewee
- ▶ People are able to talk about something in detail and depth
- ▶ Complex questions and issues can be discussed / clarified
- ▶ Easy to record

Limitations

- ▶ Depends on the skill of the interviewer
- ▶ Interviewer may give out unconscious signals
- ▶ Time Consuming
- ▶ Depth of information may be difficult to analyse
- ▶ Validity

Issues with validity

- ▶ The researcher has no real way of knowing if the respondent is lying.
- ▶ The respondent may not consciously lie but may have imperfect recall.
- ▶ An interview can sometimes be a “second chance” to do something; having been given the time to reflect on something they did, the respondent tries to make sense of their behaviour by rationalising their actions. Their explanation for their behaviour, with hindsight, may be very different from what they actually felt at the time.

Discussion Points

- ▶ Reliability
- ▶ Validity
- ▶ Representative sample
- ▶ Generalisation

- the application of research results to cases or situations beyond those examined in the study

Generalisation

- the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results.

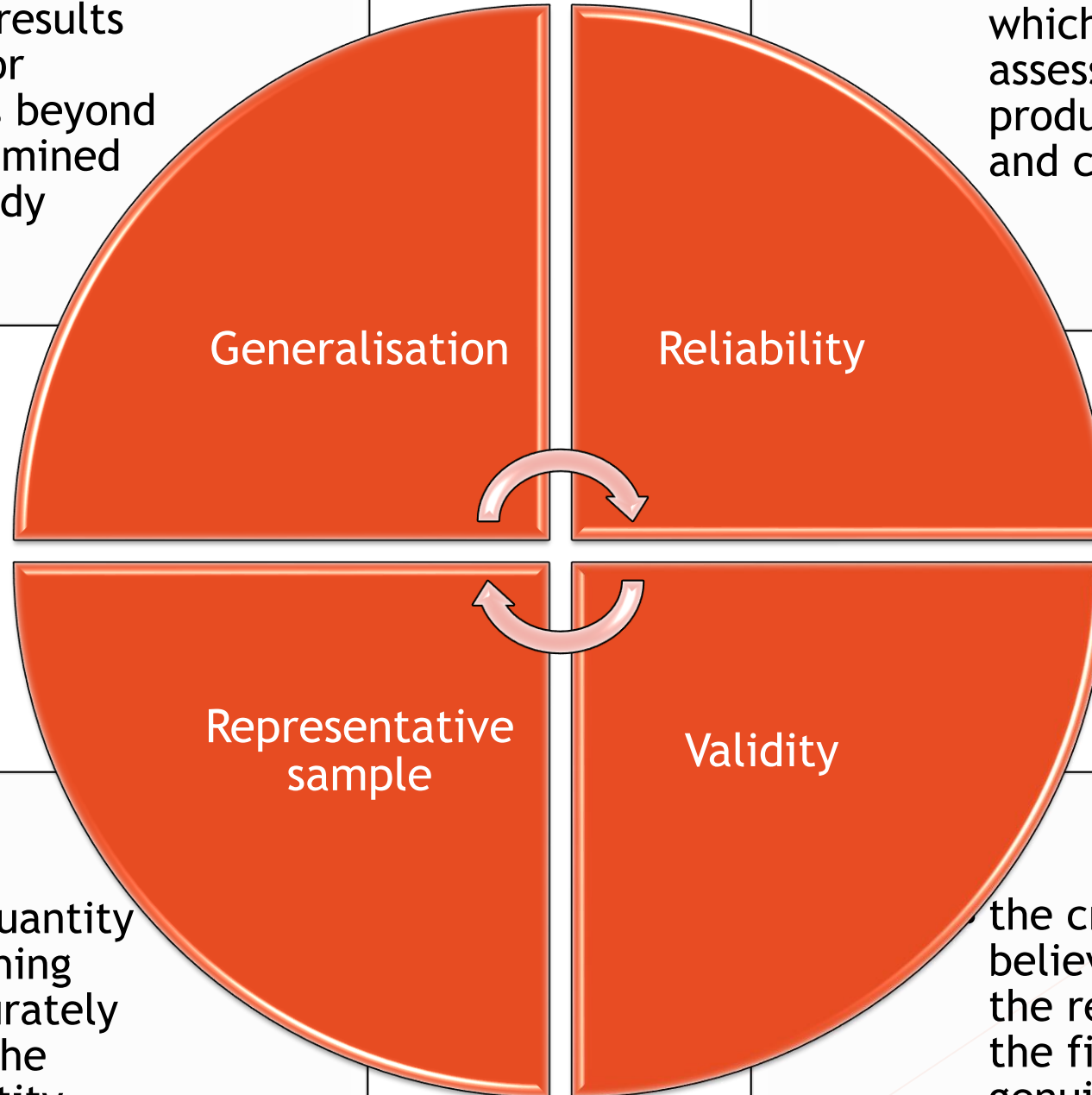
Reliability

Representative sample

- a small quantity of something that accurately reflects the larger entity

Validity

- the credibility or believability of the research. Are the findings genuine?



Focus Group Interview - Pupil voice

A **focus group** is a form of qualitative research in which a group of children are asked about their perceptions, opinions, and attitudes towards a lesson section or teaching style.

Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where children are free to talk with other group members.

The interview is conducted in an informal and natural way where children are free to give views.

Group interviews and focus groups

- ▶ Keep in mind people behave differently in groups
- ▶ Understand why you are you choosing a group of participants rather than individuals since responses may change – is it for a valid reason?
- ▶ The researcher will have a marginal role in focus group discussions
- ▶ Usually 6 - 8 participants

Focus group interview

<https://youtu.be/bPjJ6TPkLVM>

- ▶ What are your views of this interview with pupils?

Writing questions

Use open-ended questions

What did you think of ...?
How did you feel about ...?
What do you like best about ...?

Be cautious of phrases such as "how satisfied" or "to what extent".

Writing questions

Avoid dichotomous questions

These questions can be answered with a "yes" or "no"

Writing questions

Use "think back" questions.

Take pupils back to an experience and not forward to the future.

Writing questions

Use different types of questions

Don't be afraid to use questions that get participants involved, e.g. reflection, examples, choices, ranking, drawings, etc.

Writing questions

Avoid leading questions 1:

Don't you think...?

Wouldn't you say that...?

That must have been...?

Don't you agree that...?

Writing Questions

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/5-common-survey-mistakes-ruin-your-data/>

Avoid leading questions 2:

Bad Question: How short was Napoleon?

Good Question: How would you describe Napoleon's height?

If the question is rewritten to be neutral-sounding, it can eliminate the leading bias.

Writing Questions

Avoid loaded questions

Bad Question: Where do you enjoy drinking coffee?

Some people dislike coffee and therefore can't answer the question.

Writing Questions

Stay away from double-barreled questions

Bad Question: How useful will this textbook be for students and newly qualified teachers?

Better Questions:

How useful will this textbook be for students?

How useful will this textbook be for newly qualified teachers?

Writing Questions

Avoid absolutes in questions

Bad Question: Do you always eat breakfast? (Yes/No)

Better Question: How many days a week do you usually eat breakfast? (Every day/ 5-6 days/ 3-4 days/ 1-2 days/ I usually don't eat breakfast)

Are there still issues with this?

Writing Questions

- ▶ Be clear by speaking your participants' language.
- ▶ Use clear, concise, and uncomplicated language while trying to avoid acronyms, technical terms or jargon that may confuse your participants.
- ▶ Consider the age of the pupils that you will be working with.

Writing questions

Focus the questions

- in a sequence that goes from general to specific

Writing questions

Examples:

- ▶ *What did you learn during the lesson? How do you know?*
- ▶ *Do you know what you need to do, in order to further improve your learning?*
- ▶ *Which aspects of the teaching worked well for you and why?*
- ▶ *How do you think the lesson could be improved? Why?*

Interviewing Children

Taken from Cohen et al. (2011) additional resources. Available at: cw.routledge.com/textbooks/cohen7e/

- ▶ The importance of trust and a feeling of security and being comfortable
- ▶ Group interviewing may help to ease the situation
- ▶ Natural/familiar surroundings

Difficulties In Interviewing Children

- ▶ Easily distracted;
- ▶ Researcher seen as an authority figure (link to ethical considerations);
- ▶ Children are not always clear in their responses;
- ▶ Limited attention span;
- ▶ Children may say what they think the researcher wants to hear rather than what they really think/feel;
- ▶ Interview seen as a test;
- ▶ Children may be unwilling to contradict an adult or assert themselves;
- ▶ Children may be inarticulate, hesitant and nervous.

Considerations When Interviewing Children

- ▶ Responding to the child who says something then immediately wishes she hadn't said it;
- ▶ Getting beyond the 'expected' response;
- ▶ Avoiding receiving a socially desirable response;
- ▶ Ensuring that the child is giving a true opinion;
- ▶ Keeping children to the point.

Collecting data - Systematic Analysis Process

While in the group:

- ▶ Listen for inconsistent comments and probe for understanding;
 - ▶ Listen for vague or cryptic comments and probe for understanding;
 - ▶ Consider asking each participant a final preference question (so that all pupils can contribute);
 - ▶ Offer a summary of key points and seek confirmation.
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- ▶ If possible, audio record the interview. (You will need to include this on your consent and assent processes.)

Collecting data - Systematic Analysis Process

Immediately after the focus group:

- ▶ Draw a diagram of the seating arrangement;
- ▶ Spot check tape recording to ensure proper operation;
- ▶ Conduct debriefing with your research partner;
- ▶ Note themes, hunches, interpretations, and ideas;
- ▶ Label and file field notes, tapes and other materials.

Task

By the end of the day, you should have:

- ▶ Written a list of questions relating to your research focus;
- ▶ Narrowed down your list so that you have a suitable number for the age group of your pupils;
- ▶ Ordered the questions so that they make sense;
- ▶ Piloted the questions with another pair of students.

Post-session reading

You need to undertake some reading about:

- ▶ Interviews

Suggested reading:

- ▶ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018) Research Methods in Education, 8th edition. Oxford: Routledge. (pp506-528; 532-533)

(previous editions are available, e.g. 2011; 6th edition is available online:

<https://islmblogblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/rme-edu-helpline-blogspot-com.pdf> (Google Cohen, Manion & Morrison 6th edition)

- ▶ Bell, J. & Waters, S. (2018) Doing your Research Project, 7th edition. London: Open University Press. (pp209-220)



**“I had a miraculous dream in which
our list of questions all had answers.”**

