

# Lecture Seven: Data Collection Methods

## I. Objectives

**At the end of the theme, you should be able to:**

- understand what data collection methods are;
- shed light on what a distinction between a method and methodology is;
- explain how a researcher opts for a specific data collection method; and
- identify what the tenets of each one of the studied data collection methods are.

## II. Content

1. Questionnaires
2. Interviews

### 1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires are written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers (Brown, 2001). This data collection method is a useful instrument not only for collecting information, but also for providing respondents with structured, often numerical and analysing data in a straightforward way (Wilson, Mclean, 1994). The popularity of a questionnaire is usually due to the fact that this tool is easy to administer since it is versatile and uniquely comparable of gathering a large amount of information quickly and in a form that is readily processible (cited in Hoadjli, 2015).

To develop a questionnaire, a researcher should follow some stages. These are:

1. Develop a chart technique to plan the sequences of questions;
2. Take general purpose or a set of specific purposes and draw them into concrete fields;
3. Identify and itemize subsidiary topics related to the central purpose; and
4. Formulate information related to the different researched issues.

In terms of types of questionnaires, in particular, these concern mainly:

1. Structured Questionnaires;
2. Unstructured questionnaires; and
3. Semi-structured questionnaires.

**The advantages of questionnaires can be stated in the following:**

- (a) They can supply considerable amount of research data for relatively low cost in terms of time, money, and materials;
- (b) They are simple and easy to administer;
- (c) They provide standardised answers; and
- (d) They allow the speedy collection and analysis of data.

## **2. Interviews**

An interview marks a move from seeing subjects as easily manipulated and data as somehow external to individuals that are usually expected to generate knowledge often through conversation (Kvale,1996). It is a method that favors exchange and interchange of views between two or more people on a given topic of natural interest, with a central concern to emphasize the importance of human interaction for knowledge production and social situatedness of research data (Laing, 1967). For Rapley (2004), an interview is a social encounter where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective and prospective accounts of a version of their past (future), actions, experiences, feelings, and thoughts .

The procedures a researcher should consider and follow to carry out an interview are these stages:

*Stage 1:* Thematising

*Stage 2:* Designing

*Stage 3:* Interviewing

*Stage 4:* Transcribing

*Stage 5:* Analysing

*Stage 6:* Verifying

*Stage 7:* Reporting

**In terms of types of interviews, in particular, these concern mainly:**

1. Structured interviews;
2. Unstructured interviews; and
3. Semi-structured interviews.

**The advantages of interviews can be stated in the following:**

- (a) They are particularly good at producing data which deal with topics in in-depth and detail;
- (b) They require simple equipments, and are built on conversation skills;
- (c) They are flexible; and
- (d) They allow direct contact.

### **3. Focus Groups**

A focus group is a research method used to collect data through a group interaction on a topic determined in advance by a researcher, Dörnyei (2007) recognises that focus groups are sometimes treated as a sub-type of interviewing because both the format and the interviewer's role considerably resemble to some extent to what is taken part in the interviewing process. Cohen et. al., (2005) converge with this view. They add that two groups are a form of group interviewing, though not in the sense of backward and forward between interviewer and group. Rather, the reliance is on interaction with the group that discusses the topic supplied by the researcher. Hence, the participants interact with each other rather with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda can predominate. It is a from the interaction on the group that the data can be collected (Hoadjli, 2015).

In focus groups, some basic characteristics need to consider. These are:

- Size: The size of a focus group has to range between 6-10 (sometimes 12) people.
- Composition: focus groups work better with homogeneous samples.
- Parallel focus groups: The standard practice is to run several focus groups in one research project.

**The advantages of focus groups can be stated in the following:**

- Orientation to a particular field of forms;
- Developing themes, topics, schedules for subsequent interviews and/or questionnaires.
- Generating hypotheses that derive from the insights and from the group;
- Generating and evaluating data from different sub-groups of a population; and Gathering feedback from previous studies (Morgan, 1988; cited in Hoadjli, 2015).

## **7. Observation**

Observation is a data collection method which often offers the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live data' from the 'situations'. It enables the researcher to understand the content, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be consciously missed, to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data, and to access personal knowledge (Cohen et al., 2005). For Denscombe (2010), observation does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think. It is more straightforward than this. It is based on the premise that, for certain purposes, it is best to observe what actually happens.

To carry out an observation, the researcher should provide an observation framework.

This procedure enables the researcher to realise these purposes:

- Be alert on the same activities and be looking out for the same things;
- Record data systematically; and
- Produce data which are consistent between observers.

**The advantages of observation can be stated in the following:**

- It allows researchers to see directly what people do without having to rely on what they say to do.
- It gives descriptive contextual information about the setting of the researched phenomenon.
- It provides answers to the problems associated with the selective perceptions of observers.
- It eliminates to some extent bias and subjectivity on the part of the observed people; and
- it gives a means to collect data in a relatively short time.