

The Perks and Drawbacks of E-Mail Interview

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ABSTRACT

In qualitative research, key informant interviews are the most frequent method of data collection. Researchers have always preferred face-to-face interviews, but with the current COVID-19 outbreak and existing technological advancements, we are provided with additional choices in conducting interviews, including e-mail interviews. Based on the feedbacks collected obtained from the qualitative research conducted recently, this paper will share some of the perks and drawbacks of e-mail interviews. The said research which is fully funded by Qualitative Research Association Malaysia (QRAM) initially involves Malaysian professionals who recently migrated and were hired by organizations in their respective fields during the challenging and uncertain post-COVID-19 era. This current paper will discuss the authors' experiences in interviewing nine (9) engineers and two (2) university lecturers residing in Peninsular Malaysia via e-mail for a period of fourteen (14) days beginning from 5th September 2021 until 19th September 2021. The sample size was determined based on the data saturation principle. The study has found that e-mail interview has a lot to offer. It is absolutely convenient because the data obtained is organized, detailed, and rich with informants' experiences, feelings, and opinions since they are given ample time to respond and ponder about things that they wanted to share with the researchers. In addition, the identified informants were professionals proficient in writing particularly in the English language. They were able to effectively present their responses by narrating their interesting stories, giving their opinions about certain matters, connecting them with relevant current issues, and to the extent of being able to analyse it in the light of any theoretical or conceptual frameworks they knew. Apart from that, the fact that such responses were in written form, absolutely saves the time and cost for data transcribing. That is highly convenient because researchers did not have to spend a strenuous effort to carefully transcribe the interview or hire someone to do it. They were able to sort and categorize the data into themes and sub-themes with the help of relevant tools and/or software. However, e-mail interviews also have drawbacks since it requires an uncertain duration of idle time in waiting for the informants' feedback and responses. In some cases, probes were necessary. This can be resolved if researchers could clearly state the expected duration of time for the informants to complete the interview. In addition, a small number of informants also provided short answers that required further probing on part of the researchers. Apart from that, the informants' bodily gestures that might contribute to understanding the context of their full experience could not be observed in e-mail interviews. Even though the study has its own limitation, the experience gained from this study is worthwhile in deliberating new insights related to the interesting data collection technique i.e., e-mail interview.

Keywords: e-mail interview, post-COVID-19 era, qualitative research, Malaysian professionals, migration.