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Creation and validation of the interview guide: a qualitative part of the validation of the Basic English Examination Project

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Abstract. This paper describes the creation process of the interview guide creation and validation, which is one of the data collection tools for qualitative research design. The interview guide allows careful planning of the structure and content of the interview, that consequently may lead to getting deeper analysis within the amount and scope of information collected. To prepare a meaningful and insightful interview guide that covers all significant areas to be researched, it needs careful planning and preparation stage. The method implemented is based on two existing models for interview validation. The presented research portrays the process of interview guide design and formation, followed by a practical illustration of how, based on the existing framework, it can be validated and piloted for the research. It is important to mention that the major aim of the interview guide is to collect data for the qualitative part of the Basic English Examination and help to contribute to the validation process of this crucial assessment procedure from a broader perspective. Overall, the paper brings valuable insights into qualitative research and facilitates the effective production of the research tool or the improvement of the existing methodology.

Keywords: qualitative research, interview guide, validation of interview, creation of interview, interview guide creation.

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Introduction and literature review

Learning a foreign language is a very complex process that requires hard work and patience from the learners. Writing is considered as one of the most complicated skills to be mastered. While helping students to master their writing skills, teachers may stimulate them to learn grammatical patterns, expand their vocabulary, and practice writing. Therefore, during the language learning process, the students usually need to pass the examinations to prove their competencies.

Language testing is one of the obligatory steps in most educational systems; consequently, the role of the examination is crucial. For an examination to be valid, which means that “to be valid, a test must accurately measure what it is intended to measure [1, 26].

The participants of this study are the raters of the Basic English Language examination at the Hungarian university. The Basic English Language Examination is the obligatory language assessment process for English majors, where they are supposed to present their language ability at the B2 + level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Basic English Language Examination consists of four parts, which are the following:

1. Use of English
2. Reading
3. Writing
4. Speaking

This particular validation project aims to analyze the writing part of the examination. It consists of one task, where the students are supposed to choose one of the topics and write a 180–200-word text. It is important to mention that the tasks are practical, such as writing a review, a formal letter of inquiry, or a narrative. For instance, on one of the occasions, the writing part of the examination consists of the task to write a formal letter of inquiry about a degree program, about available summer camp jobs, or about a language school. The task comprises the explanation and the guiding questions, including the aspects of the topic that should be covered in the letter. The ranking is differentiated and based on four basic characteristics:

- task achievement;
- coherence and cohesion;
- grammar
- vocabulary

Each of the above-mentioned competences is given from 1 to 5 points. Moreover, each mark relates to a set of criteria referenced descriptors for the four competences. In addition, it is important to mention that tests are major constituents, as there are positive or negative outcomes of the test on both teaching and learning processes.

Firstly, tests have considerable influence on teaching strategies, methodology, and the curriculum [2]. For example, the syllabus and teaching process may be influenced, resulting in modifications to all the items and strategies, and the teaching is only aimed at helping the learners prepare for the test, thus failing to reflect the main objectives of the language learning process. Moreover, several studies emphasized the level of anxiety and fear as special factors that also impact the learners and teachers.

Tests are supposed to validate language ability for the learners' particular purposes. Therefore, testing tends to have a considerable influence on the learners and language instructors. One of the central and most valuable elements of tests described in the literature is the outcome, called 'backwash' or 'washback' [1, 23], which is the impact which every test tends to have on both the teaching and learning processes [3], [4], [5]. According to the literature analysis, it was also identified that backwash is an influence on the examination of teachers and learners, which can encourage or discourage further learning [6, 98]. Consequently, backwash seems to be a crucial and complex element of testing and deserves to be scrutinized. Therefore, the analysis of the language instructors' perspectives, strategies, practices, as well as beliefs and attitudes towards the testing of writing and preparation for it, might explore the positive and negative sides of the washback of the examination.

Finally, the paper investigates the analysis of the major grammatical features that have a considerable effect on the decision-making processes of the raters. It is aimed to contribute to exploring what the predicting grammatical patterns of the second language learners' proficiency from the perspective of the raters. In addition to that, to explore what factors are affecting the rating process, including washback, possible challenges, and strategies of the examination raters.

Overall, the present paper aims to contribute to the development of the qualitative component of a PhD thesis in general, focused on validating the Basic English language examination. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Within the qualitative domain, interviews serve as the primary data collection tool. Consequently, the design of a robust and effective interview guide is a critical step in ensuring the success of this validation process.

Research design and methods

The research method was established on the basis of the existing models for designing interviews [7], [8], adapted within the context and aim of the present study. The proposed two effective plans for the interview validating process are the four and ten-scaled models, respectively. A validation process of eight steps was established for this research (Table 1) and includes the major steps to be completed for the creation of the valuable qualitative research instrument.

#	Scheduled activity
Step 1	Extensive review of the related literature
Step 2	Participation at the Basic English Language Examination
Step 3	Participation at the preparatory courses
Step 4	Creation of the first version of the interview guide
Step 5	Piloting the interview
Step 6	Creation of the final version of the interview guide
Step 7	Conducting interviews
Step 8	Data analysis and interpretation

The initial stage (Step 1) of the qualitative research process was identified as a review of the relevant literature. This stage is critically important for the study, as it enables the researcher to establish meaningful categories by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the research field and analyzing existing work in the area.

The next stage (Step 3) involves participating in and observing the Basic English Language Examination, as well as reviewing the examination materials, descriptions, and other related documents.

The third stage (Step 4) focuses on the preparatory courses, analyzing their management and effectiveness in preparing students for the writing component of the Basic English Language Examination. Building on this, the decision was made to apply for a teacher assistant position to observe and analyze the organization of the preparatory courses. This stage aims to provide insights into how the preparation process for the examination is coordinated and to understand the roles of both students and language instructors.

Building on the review of the related literature and the information gained through the observation of the Basic English Language Examination and preparatory courses, the initial version of the interview guide was developed (Appendix 1, Step 4).

The subsequent and final stages include piloting the interview (Step 5), refining and creating the final version of the interview guide (Step 6), conducting in-depth interviews (Step 7), and performing data analysis (Step 8).

Thus, an eight-step plan has been meticulously designed and scheduled to validate the interview schedule, ensuring a significant contribution to the qualitative component of the research.

Interview guide creation and validation

The qualitative part of the research will be based on the analysis derived from the data collected from interviews with language instructors and raters. For this purpose, the initial version of the interview guide was constructed (see Appendix 1). On the basis of the extensive review of the related literature and the examination related documents, there were major concepts being explored and addressed in the interview guide. Among them are the language teaching and rating strategies, validity of the test, washback effect, grammatical complexity, and accuracy.

Additionally, observing the preparatory course and one of the Basic English Language Examination sessions provided valuable insights into the design and creation of the interview guide. This involved analyzing the distribution of grammatical features covered in the preparatory courses, gaining a deeper understanding of the key components and specificities of the examination, and becoming acquainted with the on-site assessment process.

At the next stage, interviews with the raters will be conducted in order to analyze the raters' strategies of teaching writing and the methods of rating students' writing production. In the initial version of the interview guide, apart from the main aims and objectives of the interview, there were main topics identified and several specific key questions for each of them. Several objectives were identified, such as:

- to recognize the language trainers' own learning experience
- to identify their practices that are used to teach writing
- to recognize the main strategies of the student's inspiration and motivation
- to identify the trainers' beliefs regarding the main functions of the preparatory courses
- to determine the effect of the Basic English Examination on the teaching process
- to explore the raters' methods of language testing and assessment
- to determine the rating techniques of the raters
- to identify the predictive grammatical features for both high- and low-graded texts
- to outline the main challenges of the teachers and their opinions about the things that should have been changed
- to recognize the effectiveness of the courses

In addition to this, specific topics and subtopics were also established to meet the aims and objectives of the study. In particular, the issues that will be addressed during the interview with the raters include their own experience of learning writing; strategies of teaching writing; the preparation for the examination, including the main challenges and effectiveness of the preparatory course; and their methods and strategies of language assessment. Altogether, the interview guides comprising the particular topics and subtopics were designed to bring to a successful conclusion meaningful data and reach the goals of the qualitative research.

Piloting the interview guides

First of all, the interview guides will be sent to the interviewees to explain the aims and major aspects of the interview. However, surely, depending on the way the discussion in each interview develops, several supplementary questions may be asked during the interviews, too. The piloting stage is supposed to investigate whether the questions are clear, understandable, and cover all necessary aspects, as the data will be constructed from the answers and comments of the participants. As a result, some of the issues may be modified; the number of topics may be increased or decreased, and specified after the consultation with the lecturers.

The next stage is the piloting phase of the interview trial to be conducted with one of the raters of the Basic English language Examination in order to check the above-mentioned elements, which include the timing, the transparency of the questions, and the topics.

Conclusion and discussion

The creation of the interview guide, as a basic constituent of the qualitative interview, is a complex task. The validating and piloting stages are necessary to design a valuable research tool. Besides, in order to outline effective questions and elicit meaningful and impressive data, all the elements of the interview schedule should be tested beforehand.

The study of the writing part of the Basic English examination is centered in this research. Particularly, the present qualitative part of the research will include the analysis of the interviews with the language instructors and raters of the Basic English Language Examination.

The current paper describes the importance of careful planning of the qualitative stage and demonstrates the building of the qualitative research design. The interview guide, portrayed as the major research instrument in the present context, is aimed at exploring the main teaching strategies, identifying significant factors affecting the decision-making process, and other rating strategies. As writing presumably is one of the most complicated skills to be evaluated, since it includes various aspects, such as vocabulary, grammar, coherence, cohesion, and style requirements. Therefore, rating of writing skills is a crucial element of language testing and assessment field. Overall, the interview guide created should provide considerable impact on the development of the qualitative part of the presented study and the overall examination validation project. Furthermore, this paper may offer valuable insights to researchers utilizing qualitative interviewing methods, serving as an example of interview guide implementation and research design processes.

Conflict of interest

The present research paper declares no potential conflict of interests.

Contribution of the authors

The current research article, authored by **K. Adamova**, serves as a significant contribution to the qualitative analysis part of the research project. It outlines the primary objective of the study, presents key concepts, and details the research design and methodology, including the developed version of the interview guide. The methods employed encompass a review of relevant literature, collection and analysis of existing research in the research field, examination of related documents and materials, and the development, design, and demonstration of the qualitative research instrument. The paper is grounded in both theoretical and practical knowledge acquired through coursework and a comprehensive literature review.

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Appendix1

Interview with the raters

Aim: to analyze the language instructors' strategies of teaching writing and the methods of rating students' writing production

Objectives:

- to recognize the language instructors' own learning experience
- to identify their practices that are used to teach writing
- to recognize the main strategies of the student's inspiration and motivation
- to identify the teachers' beliefs regarding the main functions of the preparatory courses
- to determine the effect of the Basic English Examination on the teaching process
- to explore the teachers' methods of language testing and assessment
- to determine the indicative features of L2 proficiency of low- and high-quality texts
- to outline the main challenges of the teachers and their opinions about the things that should have been changed
- to recognize the effectiveness of the courses

1. Raters' own experience of learning and teaching writing

- Their main strategies for improving writing skills
- Which linguistic elements of writing improvement are having primary focus and why? (vocabulary, grammar, style)

- What are the special techniques and methods of teaching academic writing?

2. About preparation for the Basic English Language Examination

- What are the basic principles and strategies of teaching writing at preparatory courses?
- How are writing skills tested during the courses? (for example, dictations, short papers, reviews, etc.)
- How are the students rated? Are there special criteria for rating writing during the preparatory stage?
- Are the students familiar with the rating system?
- Do the students get detailed feedback about their writing?

3. Rating of the Basic English Language examination

- What are the strategies for rating examination papers?
- What are the major criteria to be assessed while giving points for grammar?
- What has more impact on the rate? (for example, accuracy or complexity?)
- Which grammatical features are considered as indices of higher points?
- Which grammatical features are considered as indices of lower points?

4. Challenges

- What are the major difficulties that language instructors meet during the courses?
- What could be changed or modified to improve the effect of the courses?

К. Адамова

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Сұхбат бойынша нұсқаулықты құру және тексеру: негізгі ағылшын тілінен емтихан жобасын тексерудің сапалық зерттеу әдісі

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада сапалы зерттеу әдісі үшін деректерді жинаудың тиімді әдістерінің бірі болып табылатын – сұхбат бойынша нұсқаулықты құру процесі сипатталған. Сұхбат бойынша нұсқаулықтың құрылымы мен мазмұнын мұқият жоспарлауға мүмкіндік береді, жиналған ақпарат ауқымында тереңірек талдауға әкелуі мүмкін. Зерттеудің барлық тиісті салаларын қамтитын мазмұнды және терең сұхбат нұсқаулығын дайындау мұқият жоспарлауды және дайындықты қажет етеді. Енгізілген әдіс сұхбатты тексерудің екі бар үлгілеріне негізделген. Ұсынылған зерттеу сұхбат жүргізуге арналған нұсқаулықты әзірлеу және құру үдерісін, сондай-ақ бар құрылымды пайдалана отырып, зерттеуді қалай тексеруге және сынақтан өткізуге болатынының практикалық иллюстрациясын көрсетеді. Сұхбат бойынша нұсқаулықтың негізгі мақсаты ағылшын тілінің негізгі емтиханының сапалы бөлігі үшін деректерді жинау және осы сыни бағалау процедурасын кеңірек тұрғыдан дамытуға үлес қосу екенін атап өткен жөн. Жалпы, мақала сапалы зерттеушілер үшін құнды тәжірибе береді және зерттеу құралын тиімді жасауға немесе бар әдістемені жетілдіруге ықпал етеді.

Түйін сөздер: сапалық зерттеу әдісі, сұхбат бойынша нұсқаулық, сұхбат құру, сұхбат тексеру, сұхбат бойынша нұсқаулықты құру.

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Создание и валидация гида по созданию интервью на примере создания в рамках качественного метода в рамках проекта по валидации основного экзамена по английскому языку

Аннотация. В данной статье описывается процесс создания и проверки гайда для интервью, который является одним из инструментов сбора данных при разработке качественных исследований. Интервью-гид позволяет тщательно спланировать структуру и содержание интервью, что в итоге может привести к более глубокому анализу в рамках объема собранной информации.

Чтобы подготовить содержательное и глубокое руководство по проведению интервью, охватывающее все значимые области исследования, необходимо тщательное планирование и подготовительный этап. Реализованный метод основан на двух существующих моделях валидации интервью. В представленном исследовании показан процесс разработки и формирования руководства по проведению интервью, а также практическая иллюстрация того, как на основе существующих рамок можно провести валидацию и апробацию исследования.

Важно отметить, что основная цель руководства по интервью - собрать данные для качественной части базового экзамена по английскому языку и помочь внести вклад в процесс валидации

этой важной процедуры оценки в более широкой перспективе. В целом статья дает ценные знания для исследователей качественного анализа и способствует эффективному созданию исследовательского инструмента или совершенствованию существующей методологии.

Ключевые слова: качественный метод исследования, гид по интервью, создание интервью, проверка интервью, гайда для интервью.

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