

Practical guidance in identifying, recruiting, and interviewing international key informants in adult education research

Abby Helsinger, MS, Miami University

Nytasia Hicks, PhD, MSW, U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs

Phyllis Cummins, PhD, Miami University

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Objectives

After participating in this roundtable, attendees will be able to:

Explain qualitative research strategies that have been successful in recruiting key informants from multiple countries

Discuss developing individualized interview guides for key informants

Describe how they would recruit and conduct interviews with international key informants for their own research

Background

- » There is an increasing need for cross-cultural qualitative studies of lifelong adult education and training.
 - » Job automation, advanced technologies, and demographic changes have resulted in the need for lifelong learning and skill upgrading.
 - » Aging adults face challenges to remain employable over time in contemporary labor markets.
- » The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies and challenges in virtual qualitative interviews with international key informants.

Background

- » The research discussed here is part of a larger mixed methods study seeking to better understand associations among skill proficiencies, lifelong learning, and employment among adults in the U.S. and 9 other Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

- » For the qualitative portion of the research, 60 key informants (KIs) in 10 countries were interviewed.

Poll Question # 1

Does your research include interviewing international key informants? (Include past research.)

- » Yes
- » No



Poll Question # 2

If yes, how were the interviews conducted? (Select all that apply.)

- » Phone
- » In-person
- » Email
- » Web Conference (WebEx, Zoom, etc.)



Methodology

- » Purposive sampling to recruit five researchers who were involved with qualitative portion of our mixed-methods research.
- » One hour focus group -
 - » Participants were asked to explore strategies and challenges related to five key areas of interest:
 - » Identification
 - » Recruitment
 - » Preparation
 - » Conducting interview
 - » Follow-up



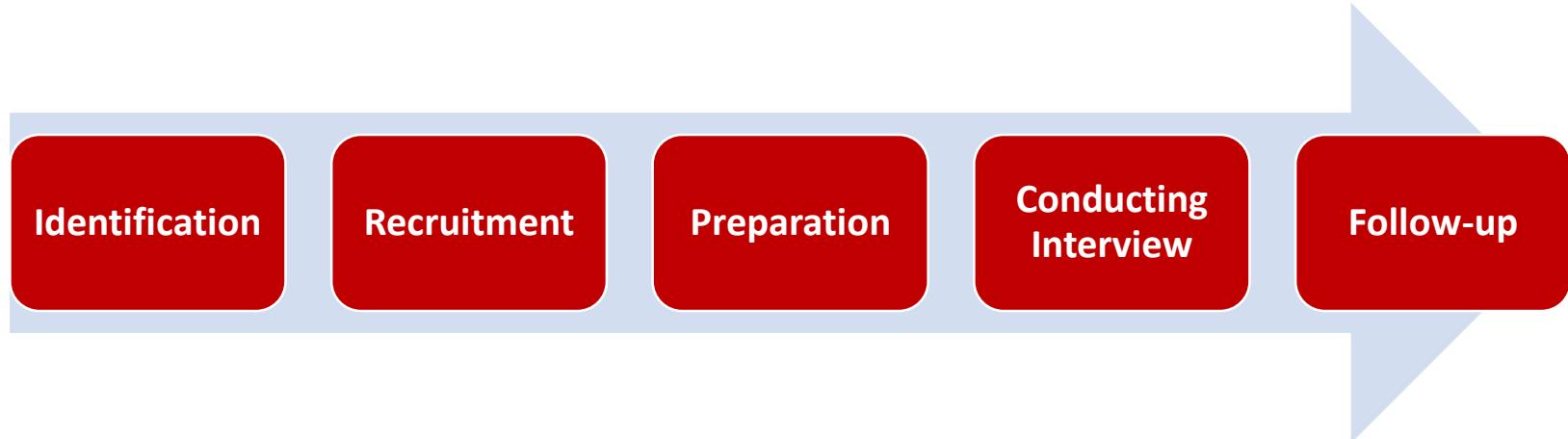
Methodology

- » The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- » Focus group data were imported into NVivo, an analytic program that assists evaluation of unstructured text data.
- » Three researchers independently applied 10 broad coding categories (codes and subcodes).



Code	Sub-Codes	Definitions
Identification	Effective Strategy	Successful identification of KIs with relevant experience on lifelong learning and labor market policies.
	Challenge	Identification of challenges and barriers pertaining to the successful identification of KIs.
Recruitment	Effective Strategy	Successful recruitment efforts in which KI agrees to participate in the research.
	Challenge	Barriers experienced during the process of extending a formal invitation to participate.
Preparation	Effective Strategy	Successful efforts in preparing for the interview with the KIs.
	Challenge	Barriers associated with the development of an interview protocol and arranging the interview setting.
Conducting Interview	Effective Strategy	Strategies related to the successful interviewing of the KIs by the research team.
	Challenge	Unsuccessful strategies during the interview process.
Follow-up	Effective Strategy	Successful post-interview process of data organization, extraction, and resuming contact with the KIs.
	Challenge	Barriers associated with the post-interview process of data organization, extraction, and resuming contact with the KIs.

The Interview Process



Identification - Challenges

- » Unfamiliarity with online platforms – Researchers who were new to the project weren't sure what resources to use to search for potential KIs.
- » Expertise of KIs – The process of identifying KIs was not always fruitful, and sometimes the KIs didn't have relevant expertise.

Identification – Effective Strategies

- » Literature review – Targeting related journal articles, websites, and other public records allowed researchers to identify potential KIs and locate contact information.
- » Advisory board – This project included an advisory board of five international content experts. These experts helped identify KIs in their countries.
- » Maintaining a master list – a spreadsheet was used as a centralized database to manage contact information and tracking outreach to potential KIs.

Identification – Effective Strategies

- » Professional conferences – attending academic and professional conferences, like AAACE, allowed researchers to identify and approach potential KIs.
- » Chain referrals – At the end of each interview, researchers asked KIs to identify additional potential experts. This technique was also used when KIs declined the interview requests or no longer worked in the field.
- » Openness to different expertise areas – Being open to KIs outside of academia, such as social services, non-profit organizations, government allowed for broader data collection.



Recruitment - Challenges

- » Outdated contact information – At times, researchers had to explore multiple websites and professional networks to locate current contact information.

- » Competing circumstances – Social circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic and differences in regional holidays presented challenges for recruitment.



Recruitment – Effective Strategies

- » Email tactics –

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- » Tailoring emails to KI's work/research, and country-level policies
 - » Utilizing read receipts to ensure message delivery and correct contact email
 - » Suggesting specific times for an interview
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- » Highlighting KI experience – Talking with KIs about their past experiences or research was helpful.

Recruitment – Effective Strategies

- » Referencing professional networks – If the KI was referred by someone in their network, researchers shared that.
- » Using online networking sites – Researchers used LinkedIn to connect with potential KIs prior to sending an initial email.



- » Re-visiting invitations – Reaching back out to those who initially declined to be interviewed proved successful.

Preparation - Challenges

- » Structural differences in national policies – Preparing for interviews required an intensive review of differences in each country's educational and labor policies to prepare unique interview questions.



Preparation – Effective Strategies

- » Familiarity with KI's work – Using websites and public records to become familiar with KI's work and providing a synopsis of KI's work and publications were useful.
- » Tailored interview guides – Personal websites and publications were used to inform interview guide development.
- » Scheduling congruence – Researchers considered time zones (including daylight savings time) and national holidays and used a time zone calculator.
- » Platforms – Researchers were open to using various web conferencing platforms based on the KI's preference.



Conducting Interview - Challenges



- » Interview setting – Video calls in larger rooms with poor sound quality may interfere with the quality of the interview.
- » Technical difficulties – There is always the risk of tech issues.
- » Language differences – Heavy accents and language differences presented interview challenges.
- » Unrelated expertise – Discussion was limited to the KIs areas of expertise.

Conducting Interview – Effective Strategies

- » Introducing mutual research – Although KIs were sent the project overview prior to the interview, researchers offered to review the project at the beginning of the call and asked the KI about their current role/work.
- » Flexibility in interview context and format – Semi-structured interview/guide allowed for richer data collection.
- » Allowing KI to lead – When KIs shared information beyond the interview guide questions, asked questions themselves, or shifted to an area of their interest, it led to robust discussions

Conducting Interview – Effective Strategies

- » Sharing personal experience – For interviews during COVID-19, researchers asked about pandemic-related social changes such as social distancing and working remotely, allowing for shared empathy.
- » Adopting video conferencing – Video conferencing allowed for a more personal setting for semi-structured interviews, but some platforms were restricted by KIs.
- » Length of interview – Interviews were limited to one hour to respect KI's time.
- » Research exchange – The majority of KIs were willing to share resources, including publications and policy briefs.

Follow-up - Challenges

- » Language in transcription – Language differences prompted researchers to conduct several reads of the transcripts as terms and phrases varied among KIs whose primary language was not English.

TRANSLATION

DANKE!
THANK YOU!
MERCI!
GRAZIE!
GRACIAS!
DANK JE WEL!

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Follow-up – Effective Strategies

- » Revisiting identification – Researchers updated the master list to reflect recommendations made by the KI.
- » Resource exchange – KIs were thanked for their participation and there was a mutual exchange of resources.
- » Peer debriefing – The research team discussed the interview.
- » Data organization – It was important to have a process to manage and organize resources, including emails, interview transcripts, and publications so they were readily available to researchers.

Summary

- » Our lessons learned from a unique international research project can be useful guidelines for interviewing KIs from multiple countries.
- » Researchers may benefit from implementing our identified strategies that allow flexibility in each area as well as emphasize a collaborative approach allowing for a shift in power.
- » Efforts should be taken to mitigate challenges such as time differences, language barriers, and technical issues.

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Questions?