

FAQ 43: Should I give feedback on the findings to my interviewees?

What's the issue?

It is essential to show respect for those who participate in research projects. This applies not only to interviewees but also to people who participate indirectly such as parents and teachers. In all cases it is important to show all individuals who participate in a research project that their contribution is valued. Feedback on the findings is one part of this.

Common practice

When a study has been conducted and the results are ready, it is good practice to let those who contributed in some way know that the results are out and where they can be found. For example, if a school has provided access to its students, the headteacher should receive a thank you letter and a copy of the research report.

As a general rule, the more you ask of participants, the more you have to show them that you value their contribution. In line with that it is more common to see researchers seek feedback or approval from interviewees in qualitative research, but relatively uncommon in quantitative research.

In qualitative studies it is good practice to ask for feedback from individuals that is quoted directly in a research report, and individuals should not be quoted by name unless they have given their permission.

Questions to consider

A general issue in all research is the use of incentives when participants receive gifts or money in return for their contribution. Seeking feedback or comments from the interviewees is also a request for additional work on their behalf.

A special issue when conducting research on children is that research findings are inevitably adult interpretations of the reality of children. In that respect it can be very relevant to seek feedback from children on the research findings, but then again, scientific work often uses language and concepts that might be difficult for children to understand.

If it is decided to seek feedback from interviewees it is worth thinking carefully about the process as it may sometimes be difficult to get feedback without letting others (parents or teachers) see the interviewees' answers. For example, a letter addressed to a teenager might be opened by a parent.

Pitfalls to avoid

When asking for feedback from interviewees it is important to think the process through so that it is done within a clear frame:

What kind of feedback is wanted?

What is to be done with the feedback?

Will the research results be changed if the interviewees think that the interpretation is misleading or incorrect?

Will changes be made if an interviewee is unhappy with an anonymous quote and wants it to be dropped even if it is exactly what he or she said?

Example of a project where findings are made available

It is common in surveys to administer questionnaires in schools but many schools have become reluctant to grant access to researchers as it often requires a lot of work on behalf of the schools to administer the questionnaires. Therefore it is important that the teachers and headteachers can see that their efforts lead to meaningful results. This has encouraged some researchers to send the schools summary reports of the findings and to make findings available online. The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other

Drugs (ESPAD) has not only made findings available in reports, but has also on the website it's 'key result generator' which provides an opportunity to customize graphs using ESPAD data. Visitors to the project website can explore eight key variables by country, gender, and year. (www.espad.org/en/Keyresult-Generator)

References and further resources

ESPAD: www.espad.org

European Social Survey: www.europeansocialsurvey.org