

Application of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Public Administration Research

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Abstract

This paper examines the application of focus group discussion (FGD) in public administration researches; Focus group discussion has gained popularity as a research method of data collection by researchers over the years and has become a popular method applied in collecting data, often employed by researchers in public administration. Depending on the research objectives, focus group discussion can be used to understand people's beliefs, opinions and attitudes about any phenomenon, it supplies information about how people think, feel or act. One of the objectives of the paper is to understand how focus group discussion has been applied as a method of data collection in public administration researches; the paper relied on secondary sources through which data was obtained by consulting text books, academic journals, conference papers, Seminars, workshops, internet resources; the study chose descriptive research design as the best approach to explain the topic under discourse based on its ability to generate the required data for analysis and explaining in a clear details the findings from the study; findings from the study shows when focus group discussion as method of data collection is applied in any public administration research, researchers often gets high quality data and meaningful evidence based results. This paper recommends that focus group Discussion as a method for data collection in public administration researches can be applied to gather valuable data that gives insights from stakeholders, beneficiaries of public services and enable policy makers to make evidence based decisions on matters affecting the generality of the public.

Key Words: Focus, Group, Discussion, Data Collection, Public Administration.

Introduction

While conducting a research in public Administration, there are a number of stakeholders with differing values; a number of tools are available to obtain data on how to understand these values and how they affect public perceptions, focus group discussion is one of the methods used by researchers to explore those values in the areas of social, economic and political dimensions that could

lead to a better outcome (Kenney, et al, 1990 &Weimer, 1995). Researches usually involve the collection, analysis and interpretation of the concepts and behaviours of people within the social world through participant observation, and written records but the application of focus group discussion is becoming an increasingly popular and have gained some measure of social scientific acceptability, the method could be used to understand people's beliefs, opinions and attitudes and how they hold multiple view points, change their views and develop their thinking in the process of interaction with other people about any topic under consideration.

Focus group discussions were developed as a research method in the 1980s when social scientists started to use the method and developed a critical understanding of its use in academic research; researchers started to use the method when the aim of their research was to explore people's beliefs, opinions and attitudes, therefore considering the growing emphasis on critical appraisal of scientific research, it is obvious that reporting qualitative research has to be transparent and objective. The question of how research should be evaluated is highly contested; hence, researchers argue that qualitative and quantitative researches are carried out on different paradigms; conventional criteria, such as validity and reliability are inappropriate in qualitative research, they further held that if scientists adopt a subtle realistic position it is possible to hold on to truth as a regulative ideal while at the same time, accepting that it will always be impossible to be absolutely certain that truth has been attained in any particular instance. This allows us to assess both qualitative and quantitative researches in terms of validity and relevance therefore the use of focused group discussion method of data collection became imperative; this study seeks to fill the gap in knowledge about the use and contributions of focus group discussion as a research method of data collection and it is against this background that this study examines the significance of focus group discussion as a method of data collection for research on any topic in public administration.

Statement of the problem

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research data collection technique in which a selected group of people discusses a given topic or issue in-depth, usually facilitated by a moderator; the researcher tends to seek the participants' perceptions, knowledge, experiences, and practices on any given topic while interacting with different people, the technique is based on the notion that the discussion elicited during Focused Group Discussion help to identify and clarify some perceptions among groups or communities which would otherwise be difficult to obtain through individual conversations.; it gives the investigator the opportunity to solicit for the participants' shared narrative and their differences in experiences, opinions and views during such 'open' discussions. People are often invited to discuss certain topic but these days, online forums or platforms are used to conduct focus group surveys, it is often used in situations when a researcher needs answers that aren't satisfactorily obtained through questionnaire or interviews, it is typically used to complement

the results obtained through other assessments conducted by a researcher who has relevant experience in the field of discussion by approaching participants who are willing to share their opinions on the topic under discussion.

Though Focus group discussion have grown in popularity and despite its long trajectory in research in the social sciences, it is a primary format for qualitative research and unlike questionnaire and interview is not a good way to obtain numerical information and very little is known about the frequency of its usage in data collection and the methodological goals that it helps to achieve.

Few works existed on how often and for what purposes does focus group discussion as a data collection method serve in researches; so it is imperative to understand when and how to use focus group discussion as a method of data collection so as to properly appreciate its comparative advantages while conducting research (Jennifer, 2016). Scholars are often encouraged to build bridges between different methodologies in their researches; one way was to state the distinctive added value that each method provides (Munck 2007), focus groups tend to produce data at the individual, group, and interactive levels; despite these distinct purposes, researchers seldom use more than one method at any given time or disregard the social nature of the discussion altogether which suggest that, researchers tend to underutilize the comparative advantage of focus group discussion as a tool use for data collection in a research (Kidd 2000); therefore, considering the inadequacy of knowledge on conducting focus group discussions, scant information on how to collect data using focus group discussion in researches, this paper discusses Focus Group Discussion as a method of data collection.

The paper is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is focus group discussion as a research method of data collection?
- ii. How is focus group discussion as a method of data collection used in public administration?
- iii. How has Focus group discussion added to the expansion of knowledge on research in public administration?

Conceptualization

Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion involves group of interacting individuals having some common interest brought together by a moderator, who uses the interaction as a way to gain information about a specific issue; it is basically a research organized to gather information about people's perceptions and opinions about new ideas or a phenomenon, participants are asked questions in an interactive setting and are encouraged to discuss freely with other participant typically to generate ideas that provide a wealth of information to the researcher (Liamputpong, 2001).

The Group could be few persons but demographically diverse whose reactions are studied especially for the purpose of getting information about any occurrence or to determine the reactions that could be expected from a larger population. It is a form of research consisting of interviews in which the group of participants is guided by a moderator or group facilitator who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion setting (Kitzinger 1995).

The strength of Focus Group Discussion relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how the group thinks about issues, opinions, ideas, and variations that exist in a particular community about their beliefs, experiences and practices. Focus Group Discussions can be used to explore or enhance survey findings that cannot be explained statistically and to collect a wide variety of interpretations. In bridging research and policy, it can be useful in providing an insight into different opinions among different parties involved in the change process, thus enabling the process to be managed more smoothly, it is also a good method to employ prior to designing questionnaires Clark, et al. (2003).

A focus group is typically between six to twelve people who are unfamiliar with each other that were selected because they have certain characteristics in common on the topic under observation; the moderator or interviewer creates a conducive environment that encourage participants to express their different perceptions and points of view, without forcing participants to vote or reach consensus (Krueger, 1988). Focus group discussion provides an understanding of the interests and values of different stakeholders and permits the analysts to predict the groups'reactions on certain issues. This served to link the focus groups to the underlying issues in their appropriate context toward integrating the results with the other tools used in the research (Parshall 2000). A focus group is a research method that brings together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting; the group is chosen due to predefined demographic traits, and the questions are designed to shed light on a topic of interest, observations of the groups'dynamic, their answers to the questions could guide future research on similar topics (James, 2001).

Focus group discussions are often used in social science and research user disciplines like Public Administration; it provides more nuances and natural feed back than individual interviews and is easier to organize than experiments or large-scale surveys (George, 2022). Focus group discussions provide and enable participants and stakeholders to become part of a process, help uncover misunderstandings that obscure underlying agreements among stakeholders and expose any potential problems of implementation.

Focus Group Discussion can be also done online; this is particularly useful for overcoming the barrier of distance (Lissitz, 2000), so it is an appropriate research approach since it seeks to know people's opinions, experiences and

provide greater insight into the motivation and rationale for such behaviors (Kitzinger 1995). The method is a useful and effective mechanism for deriving collective opinions, values and beliefs (Webb & Kevern, 2001), hence the data generated through the interaction of the group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews (Thomas, et al. 1995). It could provide information about a range of ideas and feelings about certain issues thereby illuminating the differences in perspective among individuals and groups (Green, et al. 2003).

Methodology of the Study

The material and methods used to gather data for this seminar were quantitative methods; data was analyzed and presented using content analysis and descriptive techniques. The study relied on secondary sources through which data was obtained by consulting text books, Academic journals, conference papers, Seminars and Workshops as well as internet resources. This study adopts a descriptive approach; the study chosen the descriptive research design as the best approach to explain the phenomenon because it involves using data was obtained from already documented literature.

History of focus group discussion as research method of data collection

Focus group discussion was originally called "focused interviews" or "group depth interviews"; the technique was fully developed after World War II to evaluate audience response to radio programmes (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Since then, evaluators have found the usefulness of focus group discussion as method in understanding how or why people hold certain beliefs about certain phenomenon. It first came into use in the 1920s and 30s as a way to understand certain attitudes and behavior.

There was little social scientific research use of focus groups; indeed, they were looked down upon as the province of commercial interests and used as an adjunct method to more main stream research tools such as surveys, in order to orient to a new field, design survey questionnaires, generate research hypotheses, or explicate puzzling findings (Morgan, 1997). Qualitative research flourished through the 1950s, faded away in the 1960s and 1970s, and reemerged in the 1980s. Various patterns of focus group ascendance, decline, and revival characterize other fields and were widely used in sociology, anthropology and psychology.

It was one of the core methods used in conducting qualitative research often used in a variety of ways with wide acceptance as a way of both understanding behavior and making plans (Krueger, 1988).

Academic interest in the approach has been rediscovered since the 1980s; today, focus group discussion is used in the research of many disciplines in the social and management sciences to investigate a range of issues (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000) and have once again become an accepted method for social scientific research. Public administration was among the first field to embrace group

research and it could be asserted that focus group research has never enjoyed such wide spread usage across an array of behavioral science disciplines and subfields as it does today.

Focus groups emerged in behavioral science research as a distinctive member of the qualitative research techniques where its popularity among behavioral researchers has grown in recent times; it no longer involve small groups only but many groups (Emerson, 2000). Researchers in numerous disciplines have relied on focus groups as a source of primary data (Clark, et al. 2003). Several disciplines that have used focus group discussion as research method include education, sociology, communications, organization behavior, program evaluation, psychotherapy, social psychology, gerontology, political science, policy research and public administration (Casey, 2000).

The areas of research in these disciplines are quite diverse which makes focus group discussion as a method of data collection to be used from very different perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Hugentobler (1991) views the social sciences tend to use focus groups as a research tool more often than other disciplines. Bertrandet al (1991) & Slocombe (1992) held that focus group discussion as a method of data collection is frequently being used in social research, mostly on issues regarding public perception in policy formulation (Wellner, 2003).

Types of Focus Group Discussion

Basically, there are many types of Focus Group Discussion being used as a research method of data collection; they include:

Single Focus Group:

A single focus group is the interactive discussion of a topic by a set of participants and a team of facilitators as one group in one place. This is the most common and classical type of focus group discussion which has been widely used by both researchers and practitioners from different disciplines (Lunt, et al 1996; Wilkinson, 1998; Morgan, 1996)

Two - way Focus Group:

In two-way focus groups, one group watches another group answer the focus group questions; by hearing what another group thinks opens up more discussions that could lead the second group to different conclusions than those it may have reached without hearing another group's opinions. This format involves using two groups where one group actively discusses a topic while the other observes the first group (Morgan, 1996; Morgan, et al., 1998). Customarily, it is conducted behind a one-way glass where the observing group and the moderator can observe and note the interactions and discussion of the first group without being noticed.

Dueling Moderator Focus Group:

In dual moderator focus groups, two moderators are used to deliberately take opposite sides on the issue under discussion, one moderator ensures the session progresses smoothly, while another make sure that all the topics are covered; the essence is to shed light on new ways of thinking, a contrary view point could often facilitates new ideas so the two moderators purposefully take opposing sides on an issue or topic under investigation (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Proponents believe that the introduction of contrary views to the discussion by the moderators is critical to achieving more in-depth disclosure of information (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

Respondent Moderator Focus Group:

In this type of focus group discussion, researchers recruit some of the participants to take up a temporary role of moderators; only one of the respondents is asked to act as the moderator temporarily; the person asking the questions often influences participants' answers therefore when different people take on the moderator role it increases the chances for varied, more honest responses (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

Client Participant Focus Groups:

One or more representatives participate in the discussion either directly or indirectly; this gives clients the ability to control the discussion so if there are specific areas the client wants covered for example, he can lead the discussion in that direction.

Mini Focus Groups:

Groups are composed of four or five members rather than six to twelve; a regular size focus group has eight to twelve participants, while a mini focus group uses four or five members depending on the client and subject matter maybe called for. Researchers are usually faced with a situation where there is a potential pool of participants and are difficult to reach, yet the research design requires that the topic must be discussed in a group, in such circumstances, researchers can convene a small group between two to five participants usually made up of individuals with high level of expertise (Hague, 2002).

Teleconference Focus Groups:

This is where telephone network is used; groups can meet to discuss issues through tele conference especially if it is geographically restrictive to gather all the participants together in one room. While this type of focus group may not be as effective as meeting participants physically, teleconference may still suffice in certain situations, if there is a conflict then a teleconference can be organized for the group to express their views (Tobias, et. al, (2011).

Online Focus Group:

In online focus groups, all participating members are able to share information and responses via their computer screens; computers connected via the internet

and People participating in these groups can be divided into three groups: moderator, participant and observer. Online focus groups work as if there's a two-way mirror in the room; observers can conduct special "back room" chat sessions to which only the moderator or the other observers have access, it is not a different type of focus group discussion perse but because of the introduction of the internet as a version of the traditional methods. It could be applied within the online environment, using conference calling, chat rooms or other online means (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005); it introduced modernity and competitiveness that transcends classic problems with face-to-face focus group discussion (Edmunds, 1999). However, these discussion platforms are only accessible to participants with access to the internet and are prone to technical problems such as poor or loss of connectivity and failure to capture non-verbal data (Dubrovsky, et al 1991).

Planning and Organization of a Focus Group Discussion

The research question and research design most often guide how the focus group is made; a well designed focus group typically last between 1 and 2 hours (Vaughn, et al., 1996) and consists of between 6 and 12 participants (Baumgartner, et al, 2002; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Langford, et al 2002; Onwuegbuzie, et al 2004). The rationale for the choice of focus group size are based on the goal, it should include enough participants to yield diversity in information provided, yet they should not be too many because some participants may not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences in a large group.

Krueger (1994) suggested the use of "mini-focus groups" made up of 3 participants who have specialized knowledge and experiences to discuss in the group; Morgan (1997) also has suggested recruiting at least 20% of the total number of participants required while Wilkinson (2004) suggested recruitment rate of 50 %. Anthony, et al (2009) held that the number of times a focus group meets can vary from a single meeting to multiple meetings.

Likewise, the number of different focus groups can vary; it can be formed by using pre-existing groups e.g. colleagues at a place of work, alternatively the researcher can select members either randomly e.g. homogeneous sampling, maximum variation sampling, critical case sampling, or multistage purposeful sampling. Onwuegbuzie & Collins, (2007) suggested that three to six different groups with each group meeting once or many times; but, a group typically could comprise a moderator and an assistant moderator.

When to use a focus group Discussion

- i. When considering the introduction of a new program or service.
- ii. When a researcher wants to ask questions that can't easily be asked or answered on a written survey so as to get feedback in your clients' own words about program strengths and weaknesses.

- iii. When researchers want to add or expand the knowledge gained from written surveys to facilitate support and expand on findings from surveys or other quantitative data you have collected previously (Avery, et al 1981).
- iv. When searching for an experienced and skilled group leader in order to get narrative information about opinions, experiences, beliefs or perceived norms.
- v. When there is time and resources to recruit a willing group of focus group participants.
- vi. To identify major themes and topics about a specific problem and see how they relate to each other.
- vii. To gain an in-depth understanding of a certain topic or issue (Avery, et al 1981).

How to conduct a focused Group Discussion interview?

A focus group Discussion could be conducted in the following manner:

- i. The topic of the discussion is chosen.
- ii. The agenda of the group meeting is decided.
- iii. A good leader or moderator is recruited.
- iv. Participants are selected carefully to represent the real views of the general population.
- v. Questions are asked on a group discussion basis.
- vi. The same sets of questions could be asked differently to reassess the conclusions.
- vii. All the discussions must be recorded.
- viii. Interpretations and calculations should be made based on the data patterns that emerge (Somekh 2020)

Significance of Focus Group Discussion as a Method of Data Collection

Focus group discussion provides shades of perspectives on problems difficult to solve and helps to explore issues in - depth and the use of multiple groups permits the differences in stakeholder positions to be drawn out in detail which places the issues under consideration in the right context, It relates the participants' perceptions to the results of other research methods and creates positive feedback loops to strengthen the commonalities that may be found within and across groups.

Within the scope of research, focus group discussion tends to make the participants to be part of the research processes that will broaden the acceptability and potential value of the study. The views generated from the use of focus group discussion could provide comprehensive information on political and socio - cultural factors that could influence the achievement of the desired result of the research. After a discussion, when the issues are put in a proper perspective, the group could consider the merits and demerits of the options that may be developed by either the research team or the groups; in this

way, the researcher can anticipate stakeholder reactions to the issues under investigation (Edwards, 2010).

The main benefit of a discussion of focus group discussion as a method data collection is that the respondents become part of the processes and have the opportunity to discuss the alternatives and brings about new ideas, therefore they see themselves as part of the larger population and receive feedback on the results of other focus groups which can assist the researcher on how to report or how present the outcome of the research conducted.

It helps to generate results which often times leads the groups to see the process as good and thereby make them more willing to participate and sees their views acceptable. This will build popular support for identifying potential problems of implementation and generate ideas that could resolve the challenges identified or show why it is difficult to attain any meaningful conclusion of the research (Kahan, 2001).

Focus group data provides the opportunity to appreciate the strength with which an individual holds an opinion about any issue; if there are opposing opinions the individual may either modify his position or defend it; it would enable the researcher to determine whether their view changed in the course of discussion. A cross examination of the transcript may reveal which contributions by other focus group members brought about the change.

At the collection level, data obtained from focus group can sometimes reveal shared understandings and common views held by the society; however, if every person was not given the chance to express his or her views; the researcher will need to consider carefully whether the people who have not expressed their views can agree with the majority, or whether they may simply be unwilling to voice their disagreement. Finally, result - oriented focus group discussion can help avoid misunderstandings, such that the advantages and disadvantages are clearly understood and resolved (George, 2022).

Why Focus Group Discussion should be applied as research method of data collection in Public Administration

Focus group discussion is a qualitative research method that has several advantages over other methods of data collection in public Administration; however, while, it has many advantages, yet, it is essential to put into consideration the research question, the objectives and the context to determine the most suitable method because, it may not necessarily be suitable for large scale quantitative studies, but it is good in providing in-depth qualitative insights while carrying out a research in public administration related topics, a few of these advantages are highlight and discussed below:

1. **In - depth insight.** Focus group provides rich, detailed data in different perspectives and context and a deeper understanding of participant's thoughts, feelings and experiences about issues under investigation.

2. **Group dynamics:** Focus group facilitates interaction among participants, revealing how they influence and respond to each other and revealing areas of collective perceptions.
3. **Flexibility:** Focus group discussion often allows for flexibility in questioning and exploration of new themes, enabling the researchers to adapt to emerging findings
4. **Contextual understanding:** Focus group provide context to participants' responses, helping researchers understand the social, cultural, and environmental factors that regulate the attitudes and behaviours of participants and the general population.
5. **Validation:** It enables participants to validate or contradict each other's views and to either ascertain or refute claims of a particular theory or research, thereby increasing the reliability and credibility of the data.
6. **Cost effective:** Focus group discussion is considered to be less expensive than surveys, particularly for exploratory or pilot studies.
7. **Engagement:** Focus group discussion encourages active participation by fostering a sense of ownership and investment in the research among the participants.
8. **Data triangulation:** Focus group discussion can be combined with other methods, e.g. surveys, interviews to triangulate data, enhancing the robustness and validity of findings.
9. **Policy relevance:** It is particularly useful for understanding complex policy issues and identifying the stakeholder concerns and informing policy development.
10. **Empowerment:** It can empower marginalized or underrepresented groups by proving a platform for their voices to be heard.

How to Apply Focus Group Discussion as a research method of data collection in Public Administration

Focus group discussion can be in public administration research in various ways; few of these ways are briefly discussed below.

1. **Policy formulation.** Focus group discussion can help policy makers understand stakeholders' needs, concerns and opinions on proposed policies.
2. **Program evaluation.** It helps to assess programme effectiveness, identify areas for improvement and gather suggestions from beneficiaries or stakeholders and help to identify community needs, priorities and expectations from the public service; it can also help to develop and measures performance by gathering stakeholders' perspectives on certain issues.
3. **Stakeholder's engagement and service delivery improvement.** Focus group can facilitate dialogue between policy makers, citizens and stakeholders by ensuring inclusive decision making and gather feedback from the citizens on service delivery by identifying areas that needs to be improved, thereby increase citizen participation in governance by ensuring that their voices are heard. This can enhance to resolve

conflicts by bringing together affected parties to discuss issues to find mutually acceptable solutions.

4. **Research and development.** Focus group can help researchers to make informed agenda, identify areas of knowledge gap and develop innovative ideas that could bring lasting solutions by making government to be more responsive, inclusive and effective in serving citizens needs.

Areas of Research in Public Administration that Focus Group Discussion could be applied to collect data.

There are many topical research areas where focus group discussion can be applied but, few of them are highlighted and briefly explained below.

- i. **Addressing Public health concerns and assessing community needs for health services.** Focus group discussion can be used to gather insights from communities on public health issues such as disease outbreaks or health education and awareness programmes and identify priority health needs, expectations and concerns among the community members.
- ii. **Understanding citizen engagement in local governance and participation in decision making processes.** Focus group discussion can help to explore citizens motivation, barriers and expectations for participating in local governance and decision making processes and involve citizens in planning and implementation and ensures accountability and transparency.
- iii. **Evaluating the impact of policy changes.** Focus group discussion can help to assess the impact of policy reforms on stakeholders and the general public identify the successes, challenges, failures and areas that need improvement; for example, the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has adversely affected the generality of the Nigerian society, bringing about untold hardship and harsh living conditions which resulted to Nigerians staging a nationwide protest, tagged end bad governance.; it can also help to understand the needs, experiences and hardship of the marginalized groups in the society go through.

Step-by-Step Guide on how to conduct focus group discussion

Step 1: Choose your topic of interest

Focus group discussion is largely considered a confirmatory research technique; discussion – heavy setting is useful for confirming or refuting pre - existing beliefs and is used for conducting exploratory research to explore why something occurs when limited information is available.

Step 2: Define your research scope and hypotheses

After a researcher has decided that a focus group discussion is the right method of data collection for a topic, he should consider and expect what the group discussion would yield. Perhaps there is a literature that already exists on the subject or a similar topic could be used to start with; if the topic has not been explored before, use initiative to determine what is worth study. Setting your

scope will help to formulate interesting hypothesis, set clear questions, and recruit the right participants.

Step 3: Determine your focus group questions

The questions that you ask your focus group are crucially important to your research; take your time formulate them, paying special attention to phrasing and be careful to avoid leading questions which can affect the responses and your focus group questions should be:

- i. Open-ended and flexible
- ii. Impossible to answer with “yes” or “no” questions that start with “why” or “how” are often best
- iii. Unambiguous, getting straight to the point while still stimulating discussion
- iv. Unbiased and neutral

If you are discussing a controversial topic, be careful that your questions do not cause social desirability bias; respondents may lie about their true beliefs to mask any socially unacceptable or unpopular opinions. This and other characteristics can hurt your findings and lead to several types of research bias in your results, particularly if your participants react in a different way once knowing they’re being observed. These include self-selection bias, the Hawthorne effect, the Pygmalion effect, and recall bias.

Step 4: Select a moderator or co-moderator

It is important to have more than one moderator in the room; if you would like to take the lead asking questions, select a co-moderator who can coordinate the conversation, take notes, and observe the behavior of the participants.

Step 5: Recruit your participants

Depending on your research topic, there are a few sampling methods you can choose from to help you recruit and select participants:

- i. Voluntary response sampling, such as posting a flyer on campus and finding participants based on responses
- ii. Convenience sampling of those who are most readily accessible to you, such as fellow students at your university.
- iii. Stratified sampling of a particular age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, or other characteristic of interest to you.
- iv. Judgment sampling of a specific set of participants that you already know you want to include.

The researcher should be aware of sampling bias and selection bias which can occur when some members of the population are more likely to be included than others. It is important to note that sometimes one focus group will not be sufficient to answer your research questions so you will need to schedule three to four groups.

Step 6: Set up your focus group

A focus group is not just a group of people coming together to discuss just any issue or just to give their opinions about any situation; a well-run focus groups have an enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere, they must be backed up by contingent methods to provide robust observations; set time and date with your participants in advance. Focus groups usually meet between 45–90 minutes but some can last longer, if the moderator thinks the session needs to last longer than 90 minutes, schedule a few minutes break.

Decide whether the group will meet in person or online; if you are hosting it in person, be sure to get an appropriate location because an uncomfortable location may affect the mood or level of participation of the group members. Online sessions could be convenient because participants can join from home but they can also lessen the connection; make sure you are in a noise-free environment to minimize distractions and interruptions.

Take into account the ethical standards and informed consent when conducting aresearch. Informed consent means that participants possess have all the information they need to decide whether they want to participate in the research before it starts; this includes information about benefits, risks, funding, and institutional approval.

Participants should also sign a release form that states that they are comfortable with being audio or video-recorded; while verbal consent may be sufficient, it is best to ask participants to sign a form.

Your participants must know this prior to participating so as to secure confidentiality by removing all unidentified information from your report or to pennname the data later. This suggests replacing any information about participants with pseudonymous or false identifiers. If there is something you would like participants to read, study, or prepare before hand, let them be aware of in advance or you can call them the day before to ensure they would still be participating (George, 2022).

Step 7: Host your focus group

Conduct a technical check prior to the arrival of your participants and note any environmental or external factors that could affect the mood of the group; be organized and ready to avoid any distraction. Welcome participants to the discussion by introducing the topic yourself or your co- moderator and state any ground rules or suggestions for a successful discussion, make participantsto feel at ease to come up with their responses. You can begin with jokes to allow participants to feel relax and settled, the joke can be related to your study topic or not; it's just an exercise to get participants stimulated to talk (Potter2004). Once you start asking questions, try to keep response times equal to all the participants, take note of the most and least talkative members of the group or any participant with strong or dominant personalities. You can ask less talkative

members ‘questions directly to encourage them to participate or ask participants by name to create level playing field, encourage them to explain their answers with examples.

A moderator must remain neutral, so avoid reacting to responses and be conscious of your gesture (e.g. nodding or raising eyebrows) and the possibility of observer bias; active listening skills such as parroting back answers or asking for clarification are good approaches to encourage participation to show that you’re listening. Many focus groups offer a monetary incentive to participants; depending on your research budget, this is a nice way to show appreciation for their time and commitment or you can entertain them by offering snacks or drinks to keep everyone feeling fresh.

Step 8: Analyze your data and report your results

After concluding the focus group discussion, you and your co-moderator should review the initial impressions of the discussion, highlights any issue, or immediate conclusions you’ve drawn; then transcribe and clean your data; assign each participant a number or pseudonym for organizational purposes, transcribe the recordings and conduct content analysis to look for themes or categories of responses so that the categories you choose can then form the basis for reporting your results.(George, 2022).

Advantages of focus group discussion

- i. They are fairly straightforward to organize and results have strong face validity.
- ii. They are usually inexpensive, even if you compensate participant.
- iii. A focus group is much less time-consuming than a survey or experiment, and you get immediate results.
- iv. Focus group results are often more comprehensible and intuitive than raw data (Simone 2020)

Disadvantages

- i. It can be difficult to assemble a truly representative sample and generally not considered externally valid due to their small sample sizes.
- ii. Due to the small sample size, you cannot ensure the anonymity of respondents which may influence their desire to speak freely.
- iii. Depth of analysis can be a concern as it can be challenging to get honest opinions on controversial topics. There is a lot of room for error in the data analysis and high potential for observer dependency in drawing conclusions; the researcher must be cautious not to select responses to fit a prior conclusion. (George, T. 2022).

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

From the forgoing discourse, it suffices that focus group discussion is an effective method through which a researcher on any topic in public administration can collect a large amount of rich qualitative data on a range of

issues; Focus group discussion became popular method employed in the social sciences research; the discussions above showed that focus group discussion has been widely used in research for quite some time, the versatility and ease of use of the technique is demonstrated by the fact that it has been used in a range of contexts in identifying problems related to public administration and policy agenda setting, formulation and implementation. It has advantages to researchers who use the methodology in their research in different disciplines; as a research method of data collection, the method has helped researchers in public administration to know the public perception on policies formulated and implemented by government as they bear on the lives of the general public. It is generally more useful when outcomes of research are very unpredictable which the researcher is looking for more open feedback as opposed to comparisons of potential results as in a quantitative research method.

Conclusion

Findings from the study shows that focus group discussion allows respondents to express clear ideas and share feelings that do not typically come out in quantified surveys; because of the open conversation among group members, topics and discussion are more free-flowing and members can use comments from others to stimulate more facts. The result of the findings further indicates that the value of the information gathered is dependent on defined objectives and the preparation done prior to conducting the focus group interviews and the purpose of gathering participants is to get as many different ideas and perspectives as possible. Findings also shows that it could be utilized within a suite of techniques in a multi-method research design as a principal research method in its own right or as a form of participatory action research to empower participants and promote social change.

Suffice that while focus group discussion can be a cost-effective and a quick approach to data collection, it requires proper planning and organization. By and large, to ensure that focus group research is sufficiently used in any public Administration research, it is essential that before choosing focus group as a method of data collection, researchers and policy makers understand the methodology and implications for implementation and has the requisite knowledge and practical skills to successfully generate the high quality data required for an empirical study.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions on the above topic under investigation, this paper wishes to make the following recommendations.

1. While applying the focus group discussion as a research method of data collection in public administration, there should clearly defined specific, achievable and measurable objectives.
2. Select participants who represent the target population to accommodate diversity and inclusiveness.

3. The researcher should create a comfortable, conducive setting to make the participants feel comfortable while sharing their thought on the issue under discourse.
4. The researcher must be flexible to adapt to unexpected issues that may arise from the research.
5. The researcher must try as much as possible to present the finding from the research in a clear, concise and actionable manner and be conscious of the implications of the findings of the research for public administration.

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