

# ONLINE DATA COLLECTION AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCHS

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## Abstract

*With the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), it is possible and easy to collect electronic data from the environments such as Open Education Resources, LMS, and e-Learning Portals, Social Web Environments, which are used actively in open and distance education. With data collection media, data collection method in the electronic media has been used for accessing the learners. It can be said that online data collection methods are frequently used in researches of open and distance education. By the help of this method, researchers are able to easily collect data from individuals that located in different physical areas. In this context, the main purpose of this research is to determine the opinions of scientific research method expert academicians about online data collecting and voluntary participation. In line with this purpose, three questions were determined about online data collection, voluntary basis in social sciences researches and voluntary participation in online data collection and face-to-face data collection. This research was made with semi-structured interview from the interview methods. In selecting participants, expediently to purposeful sampling, the precondition for participants was to be at least for one semester being a lecturer of scientific research methods to undergraduates, postgraduates or doctoral learners. The qualitative data was subjected to content analysis with NVIVO software. As the result of this research it is identified by the experts emphasized on the shining advantages of online data collecting like easing up the data entering process, more data from more voluntary participants instantly, cutting from data loss, increasing participation and researching secret subjects when there are disadvantages like external validity risk or low response rate. Experts made some important suggestions on online data collection and increasing voluntary participation. Also field experts emphasized that voluntary participations increases the validity and reliability of the researches. When field experts' opinions about online and face-to-face data collection was analyzed, it showed that nearly all of them thinks that online data collection increases the reliability and validity of the research. Also these experts say that reason for this is participants can be free, more flexible, unbound by time or space at online settings. It is expected that the online data collection and research potential in open and distance education will be extend.*

**Keywords:** Information and communication technologies (ICT), online data collection, open and distance education, research ethics, voluntariness,

## 1. Introduction

With the development of information and communication technologies diversify the learning environments. Open and distance learning environments have started to be used, which enable learners to participate in the learning process whenever and wherever they want, along with the developing technologies (Lazda-Cazers, 2010). It is possible to say that learning portals have a flexible structure now thanks to the open and distance learning environments that remove the process of gathering around an expert in a specific physical space during the learning processes. The learners, who join in the learning processes in a self-controlled manner in the open and distance learning platforms, can participate in the learning processes by entering collaboration with their peers on the internet networks (Williams ve Chann, 2009). The primary factor in the open and distance learning environments is that learners are active. The learners are at the center of the learning process in the open and distance learning environments, where instructor play a guiding role. Learners, who play a part at the center of the learning processes actively, carry out their learning based on collaboration by interacting and communicating with each other and such interactions can be considered as a factor to enrich their learning outputs in such environments.

The development in the information and communication technologies diversify the learning environments and provides diversify in data collection methods for accessing the learners. The method of online data collection has been used to access the learners as well as the face-to-face data collection method based on the paper with such diversity.

Online data collection is considered as a useful method for the studies, which have been conducted in the open and distance learning environments, especially where learners are not at the same physical environment (Çakıroğlu, 2007). The data can be collected from the learners who create the target audience of the research, wherever and whenever they wish without considering their physical location, in the researches in which online data collection method has been used. In this context, the experts' opinions have been consulted with regard to the online data collection and the relationship between the online data collection and voluntary participation has been examined in this study.

Volunteering is evaluated within research ethics is a very strong element that directly effects the reliability and validity of a research especially in social science researches (Appelbaum, Lidz ve Klitzman, 2009). Volunteering which is frequently mentioned in social science researches is rarely understood or applied correctly. It is considered as a choice or an action without any binding external factors or individuals. Influence is known as the biggest threat to volunteering, and described as the direct push to the participants from researchers or any other individuals. This is usually encountered in face-to-face data collection process.

With the help of internet and computer technologies, researchers can collect data from anywhere at any time. Data collection tools like surveys, tests, scales, assessment forms which are prepared on computers can be ready to be used by audience in minutes via Web. The number of researches done with the help of electronic environment and its tools is increasing day by day. Furthermore, it can be said that online data collection methods, one of the most used methods in studies of open and distance education. Individuals can express their opinions more freely and clearly in an online environment rather than any other setting and they can reach to opinions from everywhere. This highlights the volunteering matter in online data collection.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this research is to determine the opinions of scientific research method expert academicians about online data collecting and voluntary participation. In line with this purpose, these are the questions to be answered;

1. What are the opinions of academicians about online data collection?
2. What are the opinions of academicians about voluntary basis in social science researches?
3. What are the opinions of academicians about voluntary participation in online and face-to-face data collection?

### 2. Method

In this research interview method from qualitative research methods is used. This research was made with semi-structured interview from the interview methods. In selection of participants, purposeful sampling was performed. In selecting participants, expediently to purposeful sampling, the precondition for participants was to be at least for one semester being a lecturer of scientific research methods to undergraduates, postgraduates or doctoral learners. In line with this sampling 15 field expert academicians from Anadolu University 2015 staff were selected. With 10 of these academicians semi-structured interviews were executed in the basis of voluntary participation and scientific research ethics.

As a data collection tool, Semi-structured interview forms were used. These interview forms were consisted from three components being, briefing page, written permit form and interview form. In the briefing pace, there are details about the interview such as its subject, aim and extent. In the written permit form, there is information about the recording method to be used, by whom and how this data will be held, how and for what extent this data will be used, sharing these details about the interview and contact information of the researchers. Also in this form there is a two extensional written permit table about the participation of the participant to the semi-structured interview. First extent is about the consent of the participant for recording the interview and second is about sharing the direct quotes. The last component of semi-structured interview form is the form that where the three questions that are reflecting the researcher's aim. For each interview questions, follow-up questions were prepared.

Coding and listing of interview data was made by two researchers with making cross control. NVIVO software was used in the analysis of the data. Collected interview data was subjected to descriptive and content analysis. At content analysis, inductive analysis was used. Finding of these analyses were enriched with commentary according to the significance order of the questions, and was completed with the direct quotes. Rather than real names, participants were given code names like A1, A10.

### 3. Conclusions

After the analyses, it is determined that field experts think low comeback rates, external validity threat, lack of explanation, being boring or annoying, giving wrong information because of distrust are disadvantages. However, easing up data entering process, more data from more participants instantly, cutting from data loss, enriching data collection tools with multimedia and different question types, increasing the number of voluntary participation, having able to make research about sensitive and secret subject are the highlighting advantages of online data collection.

### 3.1. Suggestions

When field experts' opinions about online and face-to-face data collection was analyzed, it was revealed that almost all of them thinks that online data collection increases the reliability and validity of the research data. Providing a well-structured online setting can help participants to behave more flexible, unbound by time or space. Also field experts emphasize that participants can feel themselves forced at face-to-face data collection under the pressure. Field experts came up with five basic suggestions for online data collection. These suggestions are listed below.

1. Online or face-to-face data collection should be decided according to the aim of the research.
2. Online data collection tools should be informative and should be designed as interesting, no offensive, and not boring as it can be.
3. Valid and trusted data collection tools should be used in online environment.
4. Different data collection methods for qualitative and quantitative data types should be used in online environments.
5. In online data collection, data collection process should be planned in an informative and intriguing way.

Also field experts emphasized that voluntary participations increases the validity and reliability of the researches also what to do to provide voluntary participation. The suggestions of field experts on providing voluntary participation are listed below.

1. Rewards can be given to participants
2. Participants should see themselves in the research to voluntarily participate.
3. To provide voluntary participation, data collection tools should be short and brief.
4. Sharing the results of the research can increase voluntary participation.
5. To provide voluntary participation, the aim and importance of the research should be explained.

It has been concluded that data collection method can be used in the open and distance learning environments within the limitedness of the research. It is considered that using online data collection method in the studies conducted on the open and distance learning environments is a significant point both for having reliable results and effective use of time by the researchers. As a future direction, qualitative and quantitative research designs can be applied to determine the opinions and suggestions of participants from two settings as online and face to face. By such researches it will be possible to compare this two kind of data collection methods.

### Biography

Hakan KILINC is currently working as a research assistant at the Distance Education Department of Anadolu University. He graduated from Computer Education and Instructional Technology Department of Anadolu University. His professional interests include educational technology, distance education technology and personalized learning environments.

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