RESEARCH ARTICLE

The job applicant reactions towards Patterned Behavior Description Interview (PBDI) and Mixed Situational and Patterned Behavior Description Interview (Mixed SPBDI) [version 1; peer review: 1 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

Background: When applying for a job, applicant reactions are defined as the amount to which the applicants of the job regard the process of selection as impartial or unbiased. The questions for the structured interview can be future-oriented (Situational Interview) or past-oriented (Patterned Behaviour Description Interview). Past research on using SI or PBDI in selection process and their effects on applicant reactions showed that applicant reactions are highest towards PBDI.

Methods: The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of combining PBDI and SI (mixed SPBDI) as interview questions, and to differentiate its effect with PBDI. This study involved 46 lecturers from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). This study used (a) mixed SPBDI, and PBDI as interview questions, and (b) Applicant Reaction Questionnaires which was based on the Organizational Justice theory. The interview was conducted in a transcript form. After the participants answered the interview transcripts, they answered the applicant reactions questionnaires. The data was then analysed and presented.

Results: The results showed a significant difference between mixed SPBDI and PBDI, with the PBDI's mean ($M = 13.61$; $SD = 1.57$) is significantly higher than the mixed SPBDI's mean ($M = 10.89$; $SD = 1.91$), $t(46) = 7.22$; $p < 0.01$. Specifically, applicants reacted more positively to PBDI interview content compared to the mixed SPBDI.

Conclusion: This research had few limitations such as the interview being conducted in the form of transcript and not verbally as in real workplace context. It is also limited to studying the reactions in terms of only perceived fairness and no other elements such as organizational effectiveness or the decision making of the applicants. Nevertheless, this study has contributed to the theoretical and research development in applicant reactions, and to the practical application for organizations in Malaysia.

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ?

1

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26 Nov 2021

1. Fahd Mohammed Obad Al-Shaghdari, Al-Madinah International University, Shah Alam, Malaysia

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

Keywords

Applicant reactions, Past Behavior Description Interview (PBDI), Mixed SI PBDI (Mixed SPBDI), selection process, structured interview content.

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Introduction

The question that the organizations as well as researchers need to ask in general should not only be ‘have we selected the best applicant that can perform well in the job?’ but also ‘have we left a good impression for the best applicant to be interested to accept our job offer and is able to perform well?’.

In using interview for personnel recruitment and selection, it is important to choose the appropriate interview questions so that skillful people would want to work for that specific organization (Bauer, Truxillo & Paranto, 2004; Rynes, Barber & Varma, 2000). Hence, to some extent, interviews function not only as applicant screening and selection, but they also serve to attract applicants to the organization. If the interview causes a negative reaction such as perceived unfairness or lack of job-relatedness in the applicant, they might withdraw from the selection process, reject the employment offer, or take legal action (Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991). Hence, the usefulness of the interview process is reduced which then lead to a significant forfeit to organizations (Murphy, 1986).

Two common types of structured interview content are Situational Interview (SI) introduced by Latham (1989), which is future-oriented, and Patterned Behaviour Description Interview (PBDI) introduced by Janz (1982) which is past-oriented. Goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) was used to develop SI (“What will you do if ...”) with the assumption that goals or intentions are the instant predictor of the behavior of a person. On the other hand, PBDI (“What did you do when ...”) is based on the empirical truism in which “past behaviour predicts future behaviour” (Janz, 1982). The conceptual framework of the present study is adapted from Rynes et al. (2000) as shown in Figure 1.

Literature review

Latham and Finnegan (1993), Conway and Peneno (1999), Alias (2007), Abdullah (2009) and Mahadi, Alias and Ismail (2015) were among the first to study the applicants’ reactions to a structured interview content. These studies have shown mixed findings on SI and PBDI. There is a likelihood that the different findings were due to the different characteristics of the sample in each study (employees or students), different medium of interview (interview transcript, face-to-face or interview description), and distinguished applicant reaction’s construct studied (perceived predictive validity, practicality, perceived face validity, inclination to advocate the employer to other potential applicants, perceived procedural justice, affective reactions, and perceived content validity).

The first study about the effect of interview content on applicant reactions was done by Latham and Finnegan (1993). This study used students and employees as samples, interview descriptions as the interview medium, and practicality [in achieving applicants’ objectives] as applicant reaction. This study showed that PBDI led to more positive applicant reactions than SI among students, however no significant difference between these two variables among employees were found.

The second study was conducted by Conway and Peneno (1999) who used undergraduate students as study samples, face-to-face interview medium, and applicant reactions involving: (a) perception of predictive validity, (b) perception of face validity, (c) affective reactions, (d) procedural justice, and (e) inclination to advocate the employer to other potential applicants. The results showed applicants perceived SI as having greater perceived face validity as opposed to PBDI. However, SI and PBDI showed no significant difference with regards to perceived predictive validity, procedural justice, affective reactions, or inclination to advocate the employer to other potential applicants.

Figure 1. Conceptual frameworks on applicant reactions to different structured interview content.

The third study was conducted by Alias (2007). This study used students as samples, two interview medium which were face-to-face and interview transcript, and applicant reactions based on perceived procedural justice. The findings showed that when utilizing face-to-face interview, applicants gave more positive applicant reactions to SI than PBDI. Nonetheless, when utilizing interview transcript, applicants gave more positive reactions to PBDI than SI.

Meanwhile, in the fourth study which was done by Abdullah (2009), SI and PBDI showed no significant difference in their effect on applicant reactions in terms of perceived procedural justice. This study used students as samples and interview transcript as interview medium.

Finally, Mahadi, Alias and Ismail (2015) in their study on applicant reactions to SI and PBDI used employees as samples, interview transcript as medium, and perceived procedural justice as applicant reactions found that, employees reacted more positively to PBDI than SI.

Taken together, though the past research showed mixed findings, applicant reactions were highest towards PBDI in general. This has led to the need to further examine the effect of different structured interview content. The objective of the current study is to examine the effect of a new variable which is the combination of SI and PBDI (mixed SPBDI) in comparison to PBDI on applicant reactions as measured by perceived procedural justice. It is hoped that this study will provide more evidence and support for the research development of applicant reactions towards interview content as it is still new. In this study, applicant reactions are operationally defined as the global scores of applicants received in the adapted Process Fairness Scale by Truxillo and Bauer's (Bauer et al., 2004) which is based on the Organizational Justice theory. On the other hand, the interview content is operationally defined as the presentation of mixed SPBDI and PBDI using interview transcript. The hypothesis of the current study is non-directional as the mixed SPBDI and PBDI will lead to different effects on applicant reactions.

The researcher believes this study might provide valuable information to the development and implementation of structured interview in personnel selection. Based on the findings, it is hoped that an interview method that has a high validity and at the same time can lead to a positive applicant reaction can be proposed to other researchers as well as practitioners.

Methods

This study involved 46 employees from the foundation center of International Islamic University Malaysia. It used materials comprised of (a) Interview Questions Mixed SPBDI and PBDI, and (b) Applicant Reactions Questionnaires based on perceived procedural justice as explained by Organizational Justice theory.

Mixed SPBDI and PBDI questions development

The study utilized job analysis for the job role of IIUM assistant lecturer in order to develop the interview questions. This usage of job analysis for interview questions was supported by Latham (1989). There are six job descriptions for the assistant lecturer: (i) teaching, (ii) assessing coursework and exam, (iii) invigilating exam, (iv) managing classroom, (v) preparing, and (vi) doing administrative matters. Through discussion with the subject matter experts (SMEs), tasks under teaching job descriptions were selected to be appraised through the job interview since it is the primary task, and it can be examined before the applicants have started their jobs. Meanwhile, the rest of the tasks can be evaluated by other types of assessment once applicants have started their jobs. The PBDI consisted of six questions which were past-oriented, while for the development of mixed SPBDI, the researcher selected three questions from SI which were future-oriented and three questions from PBDI, in total six questions. It was ensured that the mixed SPBDI questions did not ask the same criteria twice.

Since the present study did not examine interview validity, there was no need to prepare the scoring guide for the interview. The focus of this study was on the answers given to the questionnaire about applicant reactions which was given after each interview session.

The measure on applicant reactions

The applicant reaction was measured in terms of perceived procedural justice which indicated the extent applicants perceive the interview questions as being fair. As emphasized by Folger and Greenberg (1985), perceived procedural justice is part of applicant reactions that affects organizational decisions. The present study has adapted Truxillo and Bauer's Process Fairness Scale (Bauer et al., 2004) for measuring the perceived procedural justice. This scale conveyed the highest reliability which was 0.96 and produced a global score for perceived procedural justice. This is considered as the suitable applicant reaction measurement as argued by Chan and Schmitt (2004) in which applicant reactions can be better predicted through a global score.

The questionnaire of applicant reactions involved three questions: (i) Overall, I believe that the interview process is fair, (ii) I feel good about the way the interview process works, and (iii) the interview process is fair to job applicants (**Underlying data**) (Mahadi, M.M., 2021). This questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert Scale whose answer ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A positive applicant reaction was suggested when the mean score was higher and vice versa applied when the mean score was lower.

The study used within-subject (repeated-measure) design. The manipulation of the structured interview content as the independent variable was done at two levels: (1) SI, and (2) Mixed SPBDI. Using within-subject design, the possible extraneous variable was the practice effect. In order to control this practice effect, a counterbalancing technique was used in which the experimenter randomly assigned the participants to the possible orders of 1,2, and 2,1 experimental conditions.

This experiment was conducted in the same room. Prior to the experiment, participants were asked to fill in the informed consent form and explained the objective of the study as to differentiate the two types of content for the structured interview. They were not told about the real hypothesis of the study. Participants were given the interview transcript. After they read and answered the questions in each transcript of mixed SPBDI and PBDI, participants were instructed to response to the applicant reactions questionnaire. Lastly, they were debriefed in detail about the purpose of the experiment. The result was analyzed using t-test to test the significant difference between PBDI and mixed SPBDI.

Results

Table 1 represented the descriptive statistics for applicant reactions to PBDI and mixed SPBDI.

There was a significant difference between PBDI and mixed SPBDI, with PBDI's mean ($M = 13.61$; $SD = 1.57$) significantly higher than mixed SPBDI's mean ($M = 10.89$; $SD = 1.91$), $t(46) = 7.22$; $p < 0.01$. Since perceived procedural justice is defined as the perception of fairness to the methods utilized (in this case the interview contents), which later affects decisions towards organizations (Folger and Greenberg, 1985), this finding shows that job applicants perceived PBDI as having a fairer method than mixed SPBDI.

Discussion

By using interview transcript as interview medium, employees as sample, and perceived procedural justice as applicant reactions, the result of the current study proved that job applicants reacted more favorably to PBDI than mixed SPBDI. This infers that the hypothesis of the present study is accepted, in which, the mixed SPBDI and PBDI will lead to different effects on applicant reactions. It is also worthwhile to highlight that the results also indicated that participants highly rated both PBDI and mixed SPBDI, where the means were 13.61 and 10.89, respectively. Both scores for PBDI and mixed SPBDI are above the average ratings (based on 7.5 as the average ratings in which the total maximum rating was 15 for the three questions in the scale). This indicates that both contents led to more than average positive applicant reactions.

Although the previous research showed mixed- findings (Latham and Finnegan (1993), Conway and Peneno (1999), Alias (2007), Abdullah (2009), and Mahadi, Alias and Ismail (2015)) which may suggest that perhaps combining SI and PBDI in one interview session may be a good idea, the present study's attempt to combine both SI and PBDI in one interview session did not lead to a more positive applicant reaction. The perceived procedural justice or perceived fairness to mixed SPBDI in the present study is lower than having only PBDI in one interview session. This means that in the case experienced workers are applying for a job, organizations can utilize PBDI instead of mixed SPBDI. The findings of the present study can lead to few assumptions. First, employees are more interested to be evaluated through their past experience instead of their future behavioral intention (Alias, 2007; Latham & Finnegan, 1993). Perhaps, they feel more confident answering about their work experience that can be evidence about their skills. Second, it also can be assumed here that when dealing with mixed SPBDI questions, perhaps applicants don't feel comfortable with being asked about both their past and their future at the same time. Perhaps, mixed SPBDI indicated that the interviewer is not confident about applicants' experience thus needs to ask about their future or vice versa.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and t-test score for PBDI and mixed SPBDI.

PBDI vs. mixed SPBDI	Mean	SD	t
PBDI	13.61	1.57	
Mixed SPBDI	10.89	1.91	7.22**

Note: $N = 46$; ** $p < .01$.

In terms of the medium of the interview, the present study's findings supported the suggestion made by Alias (2007), where if interview transcripts are to be utilized by the organizations (due to cost cutting or time saving), they should use PBDI instead of SI. Based on this study's results, having mixed SI and PBDI questions in one interview session seems not necessary, and if organizations need to choose between PBDI and mixed SPBDI, they should choose PBDI. Hence, some assumptions can be made in terms of interview medium. First, perhaps through writing on paper, sharing of experience is more comfortable to applicants, which can lead to positive reactions. If the interview is done face-to-face, the findings of the present case study may be different. Second, participants feel better when asked to write their experience compared to when asked to write both their past experience and their future intention. In mixed SPBDI, participants may be confused on what to write to the mixture demand of the questions.

Conclusions

In summary, the current finding provides a better comprehension towards the contradicting findings in earlier empirical research between PBDI and SI. The mixed SPBDI is considered a new variable that has not been studied before. Based on this finding, using employees as sample, and interview transcript as medium, applicants still considered PBDI as having a more perceived fairness.

It is suggested that more studies are to be conducted by future research which can involve this new variable of mixed SPBDI in a different sample such as real job applicants, in other interview medium e.g. face-to-face, telephone or videoconferencing interview, in different construct of applicant reactions for instance as explained by Job Signal Theory in terms of perceived organizational attractiveness (Rynes, 1991), decision in accepting job offers or in self- withdrawing from the selection process (Ryan and Ployhart, 2000), and in qualitative researches to gather new data about the applicant reactions.

It is also worth noting that ratings towards interviews might be prone to cultural sensitivity. It is shown that in Malaysian context and among university academicians, applicants prefer PBDI than mixed SPBDI. This is not supported by some of the earlier studies done among job incumbents in United States (e.g. Latham and Finnegan, 1993) but somehow it is similar to a Malaysian study conducted among students (e.g. Alias, 2007). Hence, more research is needed to study whether the result is influenced by geographical and job status background.

Data availability

Underlying data

EASY (Data archiving and networked services): The Job Applicant Reactions Towards Patterned Behavior Description Interview (PBDI) and Mixed Situational Interview and Patterned Behavior Description Interview (Mixed SPBDI).

<https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-2xu-gbgt> (Mahadi, M.M., 2021).

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Data file 1. SPSS Data
- Data file 2. Informed Consent Form
- Data File 3. Transcripts and Questionnaires for PBDI and Mixed SPBDI

Data are available under the terms of the Creative Commons Zero "No rights reserved" data waiver (CCO 1.0 Public Domain Dedication).

Consent

Written informed consent for publication of the participants details and/or their responses was obtained from the participants.

Author contributions

Mahadi, M. is the main author of this paper, hence the author contributes to the whole article.

Ethical approval number

Approval Number: EA1192021 Multimedia University Malaysia.

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ?

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Abstract

- Too much detail in the Abstract and unnecessary information was included, such as the background section.
- The Author may need to remove the background section from the abstract and put the research objective and the problem statement instead.
- Generally, in writing the Abstract, the Author should briefly highlight the objective of the study, problem statement, methodology, findings and Implications.

Introduction Part

- Its recommended to start with one or two paragraphs writing about the background of the topic.
- The Author may need to add the significance of this study in the last part of the introduction section.

Literature Review section

- In the Research Conceptual Framework, the Author has mentioned the Organizational Justice theory, however, the Author didn't explain how this theory related to the variables included in this study.
- I recommend moving the following quoted yo the the last paragraph in the introduction part: *"The researcher believes this study might provide valuable information to the development and implementation of structured interview in personnel selection. Based on the findings, it is hoped that an interview method that has a high validity and at the same time can lead to a positive applicant reaction can be proposed to other researchers as well as practitioners."*

Methods:

- The Author may have to provide some details about the unit of analysis selected such as (their educational background, and their current roles in the organization). Also should

explain how these selected lecturers are fit to be selected as the sample size in this study.

- Also, the Author need to explain the type of sampling they have applied in this study and justify the choice.
- The Author needs to justify the choice of 46 employees only as the unit of analysis in this study? Is that enough?
- As there are three main types of t-test, the Author may need to explain which type of t-test they have performed and justify their choice.
- The Author is also recommended to develop the null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis based on the provided conceptual framework

Discussion Part

Very Good.

References

In general, the list of reference need some improvements, due to that it's recommended if the author can cite few more articles from the last 5 years onward.

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Partly

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Partly

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Yes

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

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