

Appendix E – Further details of qualitative analysis

As detailed in the full report, the study employed semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and perspectives of Open University (OU) students who had progressed from taught qualifications to postgraduate research, as well as those currently undertaking OU taught qualifications. Further details are provided here in relation to the analytical decisions made and the codebooks produced.

Data saturation was assessed through a cumulative coding method (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020), in which interviews were analysed sequentially, and the accumulation of new codes was tracked. Saturation was considered reached when successive interviews failed to yield novel insights or thematic variation.

This study did not employ a predefined sample size, instead prioritising conceptual depth and diversity in alignment with the exploratory nature of the inquiry. In line with recommendations from (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016), saturation was understood as a function of information richness rather than participant count. Demographic information is summarised in Table E1.

Interview	Total	Female	Male
1 – taught students	14	6	8
2 – PGR students	21	8	13

Table E1 Demographic data for the interviews.

Interview 1 - Taught students

Fourteen participants who had completed an OU undergraduate or taught postgraduate qualification were interviewed. These interviews aimed to explore the experiences of students in regard to their knowledge and perceptions of progressing towards post graduate research with the OU. The interviews generated rich, diverse narratives, with data saturation reached after the ninth interview, beyond which no new codes or themes emerged (Saunders et al., 2018). This cumulative saturation point is illustrated in Figure E1.

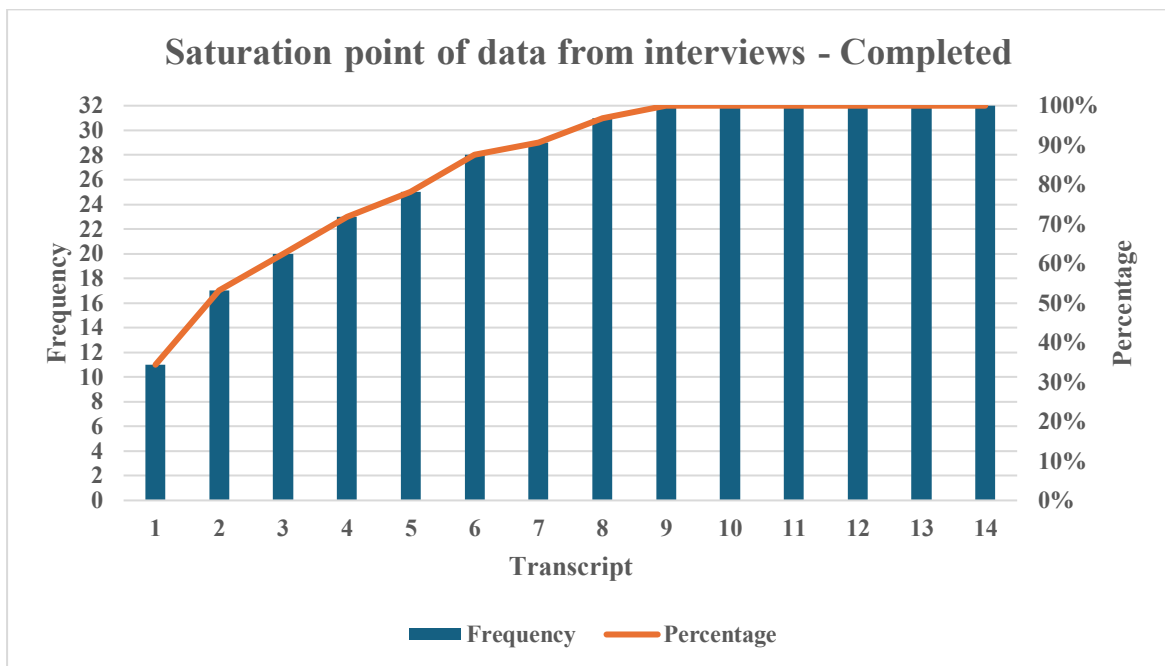


Figure E1: Chart showing cumulative frequency and percentages to highlight saturation point of coding from interviews with students who have completed.

Interview 2 – PGR students

Twenty-one current OU PGR students that had previously completed an OU taught qualification participated in the second set of interviews. These interviews were designed to gather their knowledge and experiences in regard to progressing with PGR.

Thematic saturation was achieved following the 16th interview, as confirmed through cumulative coding analysis (Figure E2). This point marked the end of new code generation, suggesting that further interviews would not contribute additional thematic insights (Saunders et al., 2018). The extended number of interviews relative to the first group reflected the greater diversity in responses, likely due to participants being at different stages in their studies.

In line with grounded theory and reflexive thematic analysis principles, the research prioritised data depth and richness rather than a pre-specified numerical threshold (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016). By focusing on the quality of data rather than adhering to a predetermined sample size, this study maintained methodological rigour and ensured that findings were comprehensive and well supported.

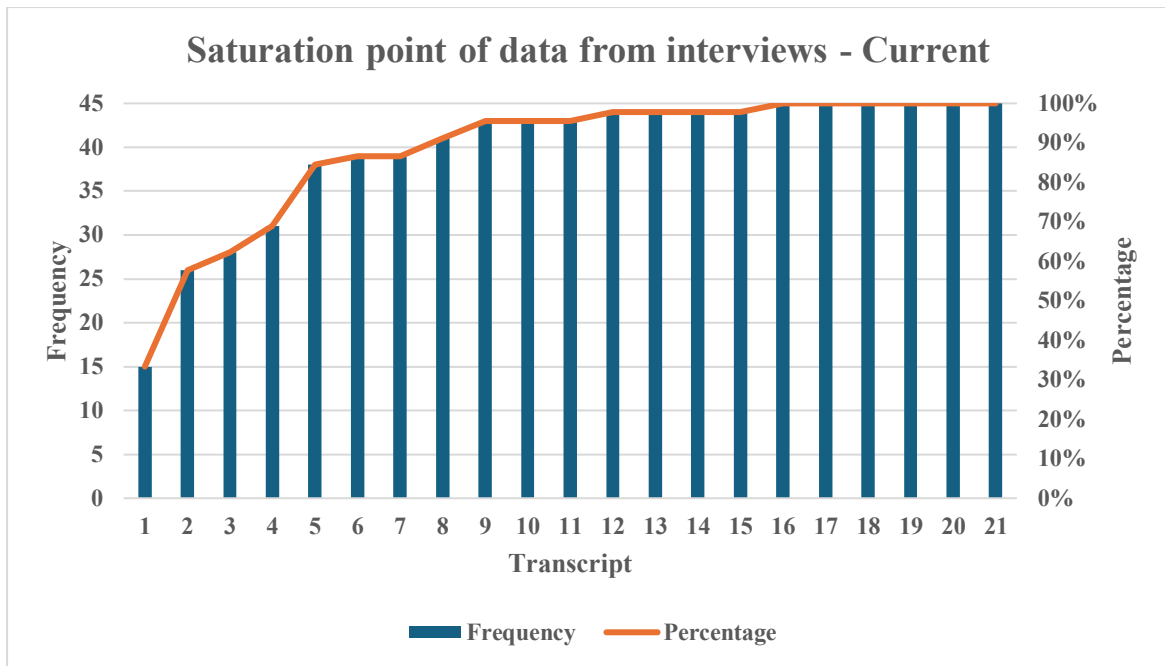


Figure E2: Chart showing cumulative frequency and percentages to highlight saturation point of coding from interviews with current students.