
UNIT 7 QUESTIONNAIRE, SCHEDULE AND INTERVIEW*

Structure

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain main features of questionnaire, schedule and interview;
- distinguish between questionnaire and schedule; and
- explain the significance of interview guide.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Basic to any research design is the collection of data, either from primary sources or secondary sources or both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is directly collected through the process of fieldwork, whereas secondary data is obtained from published and unpublished documents. In this unit, we shall discuss the main techniques of primary data collection - questionnaire, interview and schedule. The choice of the research tool to be employed, its specific preparation, construction and use largely depends on the aim, nature, and scope of the study.

In following sections, each of these research techniques will be discussed, along with their merits and demerits.

* Written by Shailey Bhashanjali, North Cap University, Gurugram

7.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire refers to a technique of data collection by using a set of questions which is sent to respondents by hand, by post or email. It could be web-based too. A respondent fills up the answers of the questions in the space provided for the purpose in the questionnaire itself.

Questionnaire is a technique of data collection which is widely used not only by those in academics but also people engaged with marketing, advertising and other fields. It is designed to collect data from large, diverse and widely scattered groups of people. A questionnaire consists of number of questions that are printed in a definite order. The questionnaire is sent to respondents either by hand, post or email. At the beginning of the questionnaire itself, the researcher explains his/her identity and the purpose of the research for which data is being collected through the questionnaire. Often, the researcher adds that the information collected through the questionnaire will be kept confidential, will not be shared with anyone, and will be used only for the purpose for which it is being collected. This provides a sense of confidence among respondents. It is ethically improper to break the confidence of respondents.

Box 7.0 Guidelines for Construction of a Questionnaire

Following are Guidelines for Construction of a Questionnaire:

- (i) A questionnaire should clearly mention the purpose for which it will be used.
- (ii) Clear instructions should be provided to respondents for filling-up the questionnaire.
- (iii) All questions should be in simple language, easy to understand and self-explanatory.
- (iv) All the questions should relate with the objectives of the study. Unnecessary questions should not be included in the questionnaire.
- (v) The number of questions should not be too large. It has been found that respondents get bored or do not have the time to fill-up long questionnaires.
- (vi) Questions should be arranged judiciously. Simple questions should be placed in the beginning and complex ones towards the end.
- (vii) Questions should be logically arranged. In fact, one question should be related with the other.

Questions in a questionnaire can be closed-ended, open-ended or a combination of both. Closed-ended questions are those that for which respondents are required to choose a response from a set of given options. Let us consider an example:

What is your marital status?

- (i) Single (ii) Married (iii) Divorced (iv) Separated (v) Widowed

Main advantage of closed-ended questions is that answers of respondents can be compared easily. Also, they are easy and can be answered quickly. However, they curtail the free-will and creativity of respondents.

Open-ended questions are used to get free and spontaneous expressions from the respondents. These can be used to as an exploratory tool to gain insight to the viewpoints and attitude, describe relationships, and indicate problems, details and events, without restrictions imposed as in the case of closed questions. Let us consider an example:

Please suggest some ways to enhance students' participation in online classes.

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Open-ended questions could fetch responses that are completely unanticipated by the researcher. The response could open up new ways of looking an issue and reveal the logic, understanding, and perspective of respondents. The main disadvantage, however, is the possibility of vague responses that do not relate with the question asked. Also, answers of different respondents cannot be compared; space provided for answers may be insufficient as some respondents tend to write long answers which will make the questionnaire bulky.

It is important that a questionnaire is pre-tested before being administered to respondents. For pre-testing, a questionnaire is first administered to a limited number of respondents. The purpose is to make an assessment of each question from the perspective of respondents. In the course of pre-testing, a researcher may find that respondents are not able to answer certain questions because of difficult language, way in which they are framed, or the manner in which they are arranged. The researcher makes necessary changes in the questionnaire based on the response received. It is only after a questionnaire is pre-tested that it is finalized.

The merits of the questionnaire method are:

- It can cover far-flung and inaccessible regions where a researcher may not be able to go.
- It is less expensive to administer. This is because questionnaires are most often mailed or handed over to a large number of respondents simultaneously.
- Data from a large sample can be collected at the same time. Large samples can be made use of and thus the results can be made more dependable and reliable.
- Questionnaire minimizes the bias of the researcher. . It offers greater anonymity. Since the researcher is interested in the answers to the questions, rather than the persons, respondents may feel free to express

their opinion without ambiguity or fear. It also puts less pressure on the respondents for immediate responses.

The main demerits of collecting data through a questionnaire are:

- Can be used only in literate population
- Response rate could be low
- Researcher is not available to explain a question or ask a question based on the response on an open-ended question. There is a possibility of ambiguous replies or omission of replies altogether to certain questions.

Activity1

Construct a questionnaire to be administered to the millennial belonging to higher middle class with an objective to understand their spending behaviour. Itemise the areas of expenditure as being food, entertainment, investment, mobile and electronic items purchase and frame closed and open ended questions to understand the percentage spending on each item and what priorities do they have in their spending behaviour.

7.3 SCHEDULE

Like the questionnaire, schedule is technique of data collection, which contains a list of questions. The difference between a questionnaire and schedule, however, is that while the former is filled by respondents, the latter is filled by the researcher. The researcher goes to the informants with the schedule, and asks them the questions. Researcher plays an important role in the collection of data, through schedules. They explain the aims and objects of the research to the respondents and interpret the questions to them when required. Most common example of data collection through schedule is population census.

The main advantage of schedule is the presence of the researcher. In simple terms, the researcher could explain the question in detail, seek additional information (i.e., information beyond the questions listed in the schedule), obtain clarification on the response, may change the sequence, language and style of questions.

While framing a schedule, the researcher has to take many aspects into consideration. In fact, it is appropriate to identify the aspects on which the schedule needs to be prepared. These aspects are logically arranged and relevant questions are framed. It is likely that more than one question is asked on an aspect with the purpose of obtaining complete information.

7.4 COMPARISON BETWEEN QUESTIONNAIRE AND SCHEDULE

There are certain differences between questionnaire and schedule as listed below.

- A questionnaire is filled by the respondents, while the researcher fills the schedule.

- Questionnaire is more rigid in structure than schedule. Researchers have no control over response rate in case of questionnaires as many people do not respond and/or often return them without answering all the questions. On the contrary, researchers have control over the response rate of schedules since they collect data themselves.
- While questionnaire has a larger reach since it can be distributed to a large number of people at the same time, schedule has a limited reach.
- Identity of respondents is protected when data is collected using questionnaire technique while identity of informants is revealed when data is collected using schedule technique of data collection.
- The success of the questionnaire depends much on the quality of the questionnaire while the research acumen and experience of the researcher determines the success of a schedule.
- The questionnaire can be employed only when the respondents are literate while schedule can be used for data collection from both literate and illiterate informants.

Possibility of obtaining incomplete and imprecise information is relatively more when data is collected through questionnaires than through schedules since the researcher is present in the field situation to verify and corroborate data there-and-then.

Check your progress 1

1) What are closed-ended questions?

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2) What is a schedule?

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7.5 INTERVIEW

Interviews are different from questionnaires as they involve close and sometimes prolonged interaction between researcher and informants. The objective of this interaction is collection of data relevant to the study. . There is a difference between “everyday conversation” and “interview”. While conversation is casual and could cover any topic of common interest, interview is based on the theme(s), ideas and issues pertaining to the study. Here, the researcher controls the direction in which the interaction proceeds. Taking interviews is preceded by preparing a list/outline of questions on the topics relating to the research problem.

This list is known as the interview guide. It is used as a ready reference by the interviewer to cover as many issues as possible in a limited period of time.

Box 7.1 Types of Interviews

Interviews may be broadly divided into two types. In the first, the interviewer has a basic idea of the areas about which he would be interviewing the respondent. He carries with him a list of the topics-what may be technically called the 'interview guide'- that would guide him during the interview, but he does not structure specific questions in advance. In such situations, an interview is more or less a 'free-floating' conversation. Often, the interviewer begins with what seems interesting to him or what he thinks would be interesting to the respondent. The interview may cover a number of areas. Called unstructured, it is time consuming, but yields a lot of information apart from the topics in which the interviewer is particularly interested. Therefore, the fieldworker has to sluice away the grit to index what is especially relevant to him.

By comparison, the other kind of interview is structured, in which the investigator prepares a set of questions in advance and is specifically committed to seeking their answer. If the respondent deviates from the topic, the interviewer requests him to return to the point. Such an intervention might annoy the respondent, making him lose interest in the interview, but much depends on how the interviewer handles such situations. Unstructured and structured interviews may also be combined. The interviewer prepares an inventory of the topics of his interest in advance and then starts the interview in a conversational manner. Once rapport has been established, he may gradually funnel down his enquiry, making it structured. The way in which the interview develops depends greatly on the respondent's perception of the interviewer's role.

More elaborately, interviews have been classified into focused, depth, clinical, repeated, and group interviews (Young 1968: 219-22). The focused interview takes place with an individual known to have been involved in a particular situation. In a depth interview, the interviewee is encouraged free expression for an understanding about his/her subjective dimension. Clinical interviews are conducted for gauging the health and psychological status of a person. Social workers, counsellors, and prison workers carry out personal history interviews of the subjects with whom they deal. In a depth interview, the investigator may use projective techniques, such as picture interpretation and sentence and story completion. When the same respondent in interview again, it is known as a repeated interview, and when it is an interview with a group, rather than a individual, it is termed a group interview. (Srivastava 2004: 29-30)

An interview guide helps in focussing attention on the salient points in the study; securing comparable data in different interviews; gathering the same range of items essential in the analysis of data or testing the hypothesis formulated. The interview guide serves as an aid or a helpful tool and should not lead to strict adherence to a set of pre-determined questions. It should not hamper the logical flow of the interview and serve as a flexible tool.

7.5.1 Merits and Demerits of Interview Technique

The main merits of the interview technique are as follows:

- Interview technique can be used in both literate and illiterate populations.
- The researcher can make a selection of informants he/she would interview. This selection can be based on researcher’s personal choice or sampling procedure.
- Interview enables the researcher to obtain data in detail.
- Interview provides an opportunity to re-frame questions, add and/or skip some questions. The way questions are asked can be adapted to the nature of an informant.
- In the course of an interview the researcher is able to understand the social context of the informant as well as his/her willingness, emotions and personal characteristics that may enhance the quality of data.

However there are certain demerits of this interview method:

- Interviews are difficult to conduct in large heterogeneous population and in inaccessible geographical areas
- There is likelihood that the bias of the researcher would influence the interview.
- Interviews are more-time-consuming, especially when the sample is large and largely depend on the willingness of informants when the researcher goes prepared to conduct the interview. .

It is likely that the presence of the researcher influences the response of the informant. Researcher’s personal nature and behaviour could influence the response. Also, the researcher needs to be trained to conduct the interview.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What is ‘interview guide’?

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2) What is the significance of an interview guide?

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7.6 LET US SUM UP

To conduct any sociological research, the choice of a particular instrument of data collection will depend on the objective, nature and scope of the study. The characteristics of the respondents as well as the field situation, along with the constraints of resources-trained personnel, funds and time are other important considerations in the selection of the technique of data collection.

As we earlier understood, questionnaire is likely to be a less expensive procedure than the interview as it is simply mailed to the respondents with a minimum of explanation. Further, the questionnaire can often be sent to a large number of individuals simultaneously; an interview, on the other hand, usually calls for questioning each individual separately. With a given amount of funds, it is usually possible to cover a wider area and obtain information from more people by means of questionnaires than by personally interviewing each respondent. Another advantage, as discussed, is that of a greater confidence that respondents may have because of their anonymity, and thus feel freer to express view which they fear might be disapproved of or might land them into trouble. Interview is a more appropriate technique for revealing information about complex, emotionally laden subjects or for probing the sentiments that may underlie an expressed opinion.

Learning how to design and use interviews, questionnaires and schedule is an important skill for researchers. Such survey instruments can be used in many types of research, from case study, to cross-sectional survey, to experiment. The decision to use one method of collecting data over another method is a complex one and must take many factors into consideration.

7.7 REFERENCES

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Closed-ended questions are those that for which respondents are required to choose a response from a set of given options.

- 2) Schedule is technique of data collection, which contains a list of questions. The researcher fills answers of these questions on behalf of respondents.

**Questionnaire, Schedule
and Interview**

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Taking interviews is preceded by preparing a list/outline of questions on the topics relating to the research problem. This list is known as the interview guide.
- 2) An interview guide helps in focussing attention on the salient points in the study; securing comparable data in different interviews; gathering the same range of items essential in the analysis of data or testing the hypothesis formulated. The interview guide serves as an aid or a helpful tool and should not lead to strict adherence to a set of pre-determined questions.

