

Techniques in Research— Questionnaire

By

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[Dr. K. Bose, Senior Lecturer in Education, at the College of Nursing, Delhi, dwelt in a brief manner on uses of Questionnaire as a research technique.]

AFTER a problem has been selected for study, the research worker is often baffled with the question of using the suitable technique for gathering data. A problem can be studied from so many angles and by using so many different techniques yielding different results each time. This is actually the time when the research worker has to strain a lot in order to make thorough studies about the various research techniques and tools—judging each one's applicability in his own field. This phase of a research work is highly tense, difficult, yet interesting. Often more than one tool is planned for the purpose of conducting a study. The selection of specific tools is made after eliminating all other probable choices.

There are various devices that aid in collecting and analysing data. The use of questionnaire, inventory, and interview is quite common. Checklists and rating scales are good devices—the former checks the presence, absence or frequency of occurrence of certain phenomena, the latter deals with the judgement on the degree to which a characteristic is present. On one side autobiographies, projective techniques and case studies are valuable means of studying in detail the individual cases. On the other, sociometric methods reveal preferences, likes or dislikes that exist in groups and individuals. A very major device of research is grouped under psychological tests

which include various mental and educational tests and examinations.

The questionnaire is a widely used important instrument in the field of educational and social researches. The term "questionnaire" generally refers to a systematically prepared list of questions used for the purpose of securing responses to an enquiry. Mostly these questions are designed to secure facts and informations about prevailing conditions or practices. But quite often questionnaire is a help in collecting opinions, attitudes and suggestions of groups of people on a particular issue. It is most dependable when statements of facts are required; when opinions and judgements are sought, the utility of the instrument very much depends on the proper selection of respondents.

This technique is generally used (i) to gather information from widely scattered sources, (ii) when personal interviews are either difficult or not necessary, (iii) when information of a personal and private nature is sought for (respondent is in this case permitted to omit signature), (iv) when all informations, as wanted, are not readily available or not conveniently arranged (e.g., data on individual student are filed in different places), (v) as a means of comparing persons or groups on a set of questions.

Questionnaire studies are decided upon when it is most appro-

priate to do so. It is necessary, therefore, to state clearly the purposes and aims of such studies. A favourable type of questionnaire study has been the determination of the status including personal and professional characteristics of various officials in schools. It is used to secure informations from the staff about such problems as training, conditions of service and duties when surveys are intended. Similarly questionnaires are used to investigate into current practices in school systems e.g., use of audio-visual aids, testing practices, administrative practices, and selection and placement of teachers and students or in determining teaching and supervisory practices (size of class, number of subjects taught, methods of teaching used). Koos mentions the following in order of frequency in his sample: administration, curriculum, tests and measurements, psychology, methods of teaching and supervision. Another important field for questionnaire is to secure background data on an individual or group. In evaluating the extent to which educational objectives (interests, skills, knowledge, attitude) are being realised, questionnaire is used. The questionnaire that attempts to secure data for planning the curriculum in accordance with student interests and needs also reveals background data about the individual student. Similarly students' attitude towards a unit of experience or a study is profitably learnt through questionnaire. Sometimes more than one questionnaire may be used for specific studies—one may secure factual information, the second elicits opinions and a third collects attitudes toward various problems in several areas. Symonds deals with adjustment questionnaire, attitude questionnaire, and interest questionnaire.

The research worker should next have consideration for the respondent's time and interest in answering the questionnaire. One should ask oneself "why should these people answer the questions I am framing to send them?" (Barr and Scates). In constructing a questionnaire the worker should proceed by having appropriate groupings into which they can apparently be sub-

divided and next by constructing appropriate questions. Trivial questions are to be weeded out : questions should be such as to call forth simple responses and that they are important from the standpoint of the respondent. Still more, one should seek responses of such character that they can be summarised in some form. Hence thoughts concerning analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire responses should worry the researcher from the very beginning. One should get his questions criticized before it is sent out finally. Friends or experts are in a position to screen and criticize the appropriateness of questions. After a tentatively acceptable form is prepared, the questionnaire should be evaluated with an experimental group in order to ascertain (i) whether the vocabulary is understandable, (ii) whether the ambiguity of expressions has been avoided, (iii) whether the data warrant conclusions which are significant for the purpose. In this process many questions are deleted, added, polished and refined. The overall effect is one of confidence and encouragement which the worker derives after this process. The last, but not the least in importance, is the selection of the group to whom he intends to send the questionnaire. Barr, Davies and Johnson very aptly remarks, "The technique of collecting data by means of questionnaires is frequently ineffective for purposes of accurate investigation because of (1) improper formulation of questions, (2) improper sampling, (3) inadequate returns, and (4) failure to select respondents who are capable and willing to co-operate. At the time of administering the questionnaire finally the researcher should see that he creates a good climate and working situation for the group which is answering the questionnaire (when the questionnaire is administered in person), that he keeps in mind the time factor, that he explains the purposes clearly, and that he has used clear directions.

Great precaution is needed while formulating the wording of items soliciting information or expression of opinions or suggestions. Short-answer items elicit

informations readily and directly. The forms of the question may be several. e.g.

(1) Do you usually avoid attending social gathering ?

Yes.....No.....

Or (2) Which do you prefer ? (Check one)

— Learning your grade but not getting back the test itself

— Getting back the paper with the grade on it but nothing else

— Getting back the paper with the grade and corrections on it.*

In both these examples the response is expected in the form of tick mark. Again, there may be the open-end type of questions, e.g.

(a) Do you think boys and girls should participate jointly in recreational and cultural activities ?

(b) If so, in what type of activities is this step desirable ?

(c) What measures should be adopted to promote joint participation of girls and boys in recreational and cultural activities ?

Or, With the special problems of women's education in view, should Universities encourage women by

(a) permitting women to appear privately for their examinations ?

(b) giving examination fee concessions ?

(c) having more convenient

centres for examinations ?

(d) any other concessions ?**

Or, What will be your three important suggestions to help one improve one's academic standard ? (Ref. Schools of Nursing).

In the latter varieties, since detailed writing or description is required, rapid and objective tabulation of results is difficult. To some extent, the range of possible responses is provided, but the items are not strictly controlled. The respondent is free to make discriminations and free observations. No doubt, tabulation is a bit difficult here. The results are presented in tabular form in totals, percentages, or averages. Relationships among data can be computed quantitatively. Independent categories of informations yield results of special value. Finally, the data should be evaluated on the basis of the number of persons giving replies as compared to the number that did not give replies.

In conclusion it can be said that though there is apparent ease of planning a questionnaire, it should never be used with an uncritical attitude by the research worker.

* W. Bender and others, "What high-school students think about teacher-made examinations", J. Ed. Res., 1949.

** National Committee on Women's Education, Questionnaire, Ministry of Education, Government of India, June, 1958.