UNIT 8 : QUESTIONNAIRE AND SCHEDULE

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 A Good Questionnaire: Preparation and Features

8.4 Types of Questionnaire

8.5 Merits and Demerits of Questionnaire

8.6 Schedule: Meaning and Characteristics

8.7 Merits and Demerits of Schedule

8.8 Similarities and difference between Questionnaire and Schedule

8.9 Let Us Sum Up

8.10 Further Reading

8.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.12 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand the preparation, features, merits and demerits of a good questionnaire
- understand the meaning of schedule, its characteristics, merits and demerits
- understand the differences between questionnaire and schedule

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The primary criterion for any form of research is an objective analysis of the subject concerned. An objective analysis would mean studying the topic of research in such a way that it involves a rational approach and understanding, and that produces the most logical result. While there are a number of methods to conduct an objective research, the most common tool that researchers consider in the first phase of conducting any research is a questionnaire. A questionnaire is basically a series of questions relevant

to the topic of research that are put together and given to the respondent for response. The respondent is expected to fill up the questionnaire, which then serves as primary data for the concerned research. In simple words, a questionnaire can be defined as a research instrument which has a series of pre-set questions that are framed in a certain way to gather objective information from respondents. It is a most popular and widely used technique of data collection used in field survey. In the previous unit, we have discussed about inerview as a method of data collection. In this unit we shall learn about Questionnaire and Schedule as tools of data collection.

8.3 A GOOD QUESTIONNAIRE: PREPARATION AND FEATURES

Preparing a good questionnaire can be quite a task. It is a time-consuming and complex process. A good quality questionnaire is a must for good quality data, and so the preparation of a questionnaire must always keep in mind the needs of the research concerned. A Questionnaire can be structured or semi-structured depending on the needs of the research. Structured or closed questionnaires usually consist of pre-set options from which respondents need to choose their answer. Semi-structured or open-ended questionnaires consist of fixed questions but leaves space for the respondents to answer in their own words. Semi-structured questionnaire may result in subjective answers for some questions, and hence does not fully qualify as quantitative data. Structured or closed questionnaire results in more objective answers, which help the researcher to quantify the data and analyze it.

A good questionnaire is expected to have simple, short and crisp questions that are easily understandable by the respondents. The more comprehensible the questionnaire is, the more possibility that the data gained from it is objective and rational.

A good questionnaire should be comprehensible by the respondents. It may emphasize on the significant or important areas of the concerned research and yet the questions should be framed in a way so that the respondents do not hesitate to put forward their answers or opinions. The

responsibility of a good questionnaire towards research is that the respondents should realize the importance of the questions asked and not brush them off as unimportant or insignificant.

A good questionnaire should consist of logical questions looking for logical answers. The questions should be set in such a way that the researcher is able to put across her point in the easiest possible language using minimum sentences. Unnecessary length of questions tends to confuse the respondents and run the risk of misinterpretation.

A good questionnaire should avoid questions that may be embarrassing or annoying to the respondents. Although questionnaire as a data collection tool does not leave much ground for the respondents to express themselves subjectively and also in most cases guarantee anonymity, in the ones that involve face to face interaction with the respondents, the questions should be framed with more sensitivity and care so as to not make the respondent uncomfortable. This is important for getting data which is not coloured by uneasiness.

Above all, a good questionnaire should be attractive. It should be designed in such a way that it draws the interest of the respondents. A skilful designing is thus the most important thing to do while preparing a research questionnaire, since no matter how important the questionnaires are, failure to engage the respondents would directly mean failure of the questionnaire to collect adequate data.

8.4 TYPES OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Two most significant dimension along which questionaires commonly vary are :

- Degree of structure, and
- Number of response possibilities.
- **Degree of Structure :** In light of degree of structure questionaires may be of two types, ic structured and instructured. Structured questionaires are those in which the questions to be asked from the respondents and the instruction to be followed by the interviewers are very precisely and concisely stated in advance.

On the otherhand, unstructured questionaires are those in which specify only the broad areas of a subject and not the form or sequence of questions. In this context, formulation of questions is left to the interviewers themselves who are free to question respondents as their own choice.

- **Number of response possibilities :** Here, questionaires also vary in respect of the number of response possibilities provided to the subject. If a question provides the subject with only two response possibilities it is known a dichotomous question.

8.5 MERITS AND DEMERITS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

As said above, a good questionnaire is a must for a good quantitative research. However, using questionnaire as a research tool has its own advantages and disadvantages, and hence, should only be used depending on the requirements of the research. For example, some research might demand elaborate subjective opinion from the respondents. In that case, a questionnaire would not prove to be fruitful in terms of data. Whereas, a research which demands objective answers from respondents would benefit a lot from a well designed, good and crisp questionnaire. Hence, as per the need of the research concerned, a questionnaire can primarily be divided into closed questionnaires and open ended questionnaires. To elaborate further, we shall discuss a few merits and demerits of questionnaires in general that fit into both the categories.

- **MERITS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE :**

➢ **Cost effective :** The best thing about a questionnaire is that it is cost effective. It is economical both in terms of time and money, to say the least, since it does not always require the researcher to interact with the respondents at a personal level. It thus saves research time which is precious and also money as there is not a lot of travelling involved. Further, a large number of data can be collected from a large population in a very less time, making it one of the most convenient tools for conducting objective research.

➢ **Standardization of facts :** As a research tool a questionnaire makes the data easy to analyze. The data collected through a questionnaire

can thus be used to arrive at a generalization regarding a particular research finding. Questionnaire is the easiest way to derive patterns of social realities on the basis of information received from the data. It also helps the researcher to codify the patterns, further making it useful as quantitative data.

- **Comparable :** One important benefit of using questionnaire as a research tool is that of comparability. The data collected through multiple questionnaires on the same topic from different respondents can be compared to arrive at generalizations or patterns of social reality. A skilful researcher may design the same set of questions in different and tactful ways for potentially diverse response from the same respondents. Though a questionnaire does not leave much room for the researcher to peak into the subjectivities of the answers provided by the respondents, the said trick proves to be useful in most cases.
- **Anonymity :** Anonymity provides most respondents with the comfort to answer certain questions that they think might be controversial or uncomfortable. A Questionnaire also ensures a kind of detachment from the answer provided, making the respondents flexible with their opinions. Without having to write one's name on it, one becomes free from the fear of unwanted associations, thus being able to contribute towards an objective data.
- **Quantifiable :** Questionnaire can help provide data which is quantifiable, that is, data which can be standardized and used for further research in similar and extended areas. A closed questionnaire is more effective in deriving quantified data.

- **DEMERITS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE :**

- **Lack of Personal Contact with Respondents :** One of the major demerits of questionnaire as a tool of data collection is that it does not allow the researcher to have personal interaction or contact with the respondents. This disadvantage also leads to further disadvantages throughout the process of the research, such as lack of subjective and diverse perspectives in the research, including

lack of empathy, issues of validation, etc. No personal contact between the researcher and the respondents also generates a sense of detachment on the part of both the parties, resulting in a danger of the research being taken casually.

- **Poor response :** This immediately follows the above mentioned disadvantage. A Questionnaire always runs the risk of gaining poor response among the respondents. This could be because of multiple reasons such as laziness, unwillingness, busyness and other personal reasons of the respondent, but the primary reason is generally lack of personal contact between the researcher and the respondent. This could also lead to situations like incompletely filled questionnaires or half-hearted responses.
- **Issue of validation :** Questionnaire as a research tool can face serious issues of validation. Questionnaire is always done in written format and since not all of the respondents may be well-versed in the language used, there may be misinterpretation of the questions asked. This will obviously result in poor quality data or wrong data, thus hampering the findings of the research. Further, the researcher might not be physically present while the questionnaire was being filled up (in terms of online questionnaire or postal questionnaire). Hence, there is no way that the researcher can explain a difficult question or rephrase it to make it understandable for the respondent. This also means that the researcher would generally be clueless about any manipulation of information by the respondents.
- **Misinterpretation :** In the case of questionnaire, the issue of misinterpretation can be faced by both respondents and the researcher, since the researcher is often not present while the respondent is filling the questionnaire and the respondents too are likely to not be present while the researcher is interpreting the responses. The researcher might also face the problem of legibility in responses filled in by respondents, due to bad handwriting or unclear answers (in case of open ended questionnaires).

As mentioned above, preparation of a questionnaire has a lot to do with the quality of the data collected. A good questionnaire is most likely to lead the researcher to a good quality data. Despite the limitations that it is susceptible to, questionnaire is a very popular tool of collecting data in both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

8.6 SCHEDULE: MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

Preparing a good interview schedule is no less than an art. It requires proper skill, prior experience and knowledge about the topic of research. K.D. Gangrade defines schedule as a form filled in during a personal interview in which both interviewer and the respondent are present and it contains a set of questions which are asked and filled in by an interviewer in a face to face situation. A schedule works as a tool in which all the respondents are usually supposed to respond to the same questions asked in the same language. This is done in order to derive at a uniformity regarding the answers received. The primary requirement of schedule is that the questions to be asked have to be written down before the interview starts and not during the interview. However, schedule provides flexibility to the researcher to reframe questions during the interview, if the respondents find difficulty in understanding the same.

8.7 MERITS AND DEMERITS OF A SCHEDULE

MERITS OF A SCHEDULE :

- **Richness of data:** One primary advantage of using interview schedule as data collection tool is that the respondents do not have to write down their opinion or answers. They can simply express their viewpoints by speaking to the researcher, and it is the researcher who notes down the answers. This technique has greater possibility of extracting extensive information in a limited period of time because it is more comfortable to speak rather than to write.
- **Flexibility of questions:** A smart researcher can also use spontaneous tricks of framing and reframing questions from the schedule to extract more reliable data from the respondents. By

using the advantage of flexibility the validity of data can be cross-checked, apart from allowing the researcher to explain to the respondents the questions that the latter find tough or complicated.

- **Making passage for a smooth interview:** Using a schedule makes the course of an interview easier since the researcher then already has a set of questions in hand to begin with, the flow of which further decides the course of the interview.
- **Customized information from personal interaction:** Face to face interaction with the respondents enables the researcher to add certain additional or special information while noting down responses that may be revealed while the respondents vocally express their answers.

DEMERITS OF SCHEDULE :

- **Expensive and time consuming:** Employing an enumerator can be expensive in terms of time and money (training, salary and travel cost). Even if the researcher carries out the schedule by herself it is time consuming and expensive as she has to visit places and interact with the respondents personally.
- **Personal bias:** Although personally explaining the pre-set questions to the respondents reduce the possibility of misinterpretation, it runs the risk of personal bias in interpreting the answers given by respondents on the part of the researcher. Therefore, honesty and competency of the researcher is of supreme importance here.
- **Issue of uniformity of data:** If a single interview schedule is followed by more than one interviewer in a particular research, then the uniformity of data might not be achieved because of the flexible nature of schedule that allows interviewers to interpret the responses from informants. The more the number of interviewers, the lesser the uniformity of data received.
- **Limited size of research sample:** By virtue of involving face to face interaction, schedule as a tool of data collection faces certain physical limitations, of which size of the sample is the most important one. Schedule involves a smaller population, comprising of only the

areas which are physically or manually accessible to the interviewer, thus leading to complications in forming social patterns.

Despite the disadvantages, interview schedule is a highly recommended tool for conducting social science research, especially in research that involves personal interviews. Following a schedule makes the course of an interview smoother, giving the researcher the opportunity to be ready with a set of questions to be asked or to be stressed on.

8.8 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUESTIONNAIRE AND SCHEDULE

It is a common tendency among researchers to use questionnaire and schedule interchangeably, and they do seem to be similar in certain cases. However, there are quite a few differences between the two.

Both consist of a series of pre-set questions to be answered by the respondents, but the fundamental difference between a questionnaire and a schedule is that the questionnaire has to be filled by the respondents, while a schedule must be filled by the enumerator or the researcher herself on behalf of the respondents.

Both are primary methods of data collection in which data is obtained by asking questions, but a questionnaire is designed to collect data from large, diverse and widely scattered groups of people whereas a schedule usually caters to a smaller population with whom the researcher interacts personally.

A questionnaire may or may not involve personal interaction (can be sent to the respondent via mail to be filled online or by post) whereas a schedule fundamentally involves personal interaction between the researcher and the respondents.

Both have same pre-set questions for all the respondents to ensure reliability of data. But in most cases, a questionnaire is comparatively rigid, using standardized words and phrases to get uniform results. A schedule on the other hand is more flexible, allowing the interviewer to modify the questions as per requirement of the interview scene.

The success of a questionnaire is majorly determined by the quality of the questions asked whereas that of a schedule depends on the honesty and competence of the interviewer.

However, qualities that both questionnaire and schedule must possess as primary data collection tools are that they have to be clear and comprehensible and at the same time sensible to the respondents, and they both must be prepared responsibly so as to bring out data of rich quality.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1 : Fill in the blanks :

(a) Questionnaire is a series of _____ questions to gather _____ information from respondents.

(b) A good questionnaire should be _____ by the respondents.

(c) Questionnaire is a cost effective tool for data collection. True or false?

(d) In a schedule, the answers of the respondents are filled up by_____.

(e) A schedule allows _____ to the interviewer in terms of reframing questions.

(f) Questionnaire and interview are both _____ tools of data collection.



8.9 LET US SUM UP

- A questionnaire can be defined as a research instrument which has a series of pre-set questions that are framed in a certain way to gather objective information from respondents.
- Questionnaire is one of the most common tools used by researchers in the first phase of conducting research.

- A questionnaire is basically a series of questions relevant to the topic of research that are put together and given to the respondent.
- Questionnaire can primarily be divided into closed questionnaires and open ended questionnaires.
- Questionnaire can be structured or semi-structured, depending on the needs of the research.
- Structured or closed questionnaires usually consist of pre-set options from which respondents need to choose their answer.
- Semi-structured or open-ended questionnaires consist of fixed questions but leave space for the respondents to answer in their own words.
- A good questionnaire should be comprehensible by the respondents.
- A good questionnaire should consist of logical questions looking for logical answers.
- A good questionnaire should avoid questions that may be embarrassing or annoying for the respondents.
- A good questionnaire should be designed in such a way that it draws the interest of the respondents. Failure to do so might lead to failure of the questionnaire to collect adequate data.
- Questionnaire as a data collection tool is cost effective. It is economical both in terms of time and money.
- Questionnaire makes the data easy to analyze. The data collected through questionnaire can be used to arrive at a generalization regarding a particular research finding and deriving patterns of social realities.
- Use of questionnaire makes data easily comparable and hence quantifiable.
- One of the major demerits of questionnaire as a tool of data collection is that it does not allow the researcher to have personal interaction or contact with the respondents, followed by poor response rate, issue of validation and misinterpretation.
- Schedule is a form filled in during a personal interview in which both interviewer and the respondent are present and it contains a set of questions which are asked and filled in by an interviewer in a face to face situation.

- The primary requirement of schedule is that the questions to be asked have to be written down before the interview starts and not during the interview.
- Schedule provides flexibility to the researcher to reframe questions during the interview.
- A questionnaire has to be filled by the respondents, while a schedule must be filled by the enumerator or the researcher herself on behalf of the respondents.
- A questionnaire collects data from large, diverse and widely scattered groups of people whereas a schedule usually caters to a smaller population with whom the researcher interacts personally.



8.10 FURTHER READING

1) Kvale, S., (1996) InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. Sage.

2) Rubin, H.J., and Rubin, I. S., (2004) Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data. 2nd Edition. Sage.

http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/sites/default/files/programme_resources/lse/lse_pdf/subject_guides/sc2145_ch1-3.pdf



8.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q. No 1 :

(a) Pre-set (b) Comprehensible (c) True

(d) Interviewer (e) Flexibility (f) Primary