

Level: Master 1 (LS)

Module: Methodology in Social Sciences

Research Instruments

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Research Instruments

The phase of data collection relies on the use of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are often in the form of research instruments including questionnaires, interviews, and observation.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a set of written questions used to collect two types of data: facts and opinions. A factual questionnaire asks the respondents about facts while an inventory is a questionnaire asking informants about attitudes and preferences. However, data about facts and opinions can be gathered within the same questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire may include three types of questions: close-ended, open-ended and multiple choice questions. The close-ended question involves answers with 'Yes' or 'No'. The multiple choice question requires the respondents to select one answer or more from a set of responses or alternatives. In fact, the close-ended and the multiple choice questions provide quantitative data. They are answered quickly and are analysed easily. The third type of questions is the open-ended question which necessitates a long answer. It provides qualitative data. It takes longer to answer and is difficult to analyse.

The Questionnaire

When designing a questionnaire, one should keep in mind the following information:

- Begin with an introduction that elicits the purpose of the questionnaire and asks for the consent of the informants.
- Use a simple style and provide clear instructions.
- Respect the question order by listing the questions in a form that shifts from general to specific and from close-ended to open-ended questions.
- Pilot the questionnaire to check if the questions are relevant.

The Questionnaire

When designing a questionnaire, one should also take into account the following information:

- Avoid double-barrelled questions. For example: What do you think about learning and teaching English as a foreign language?
- Avoid leading questions which force the respondent to choose answers from a list of responses that are alike as if the researcher wants the respondent to give a specific response. For instance: How do you evaluate your level in English?
Satisfactory - good - excellent
- Minimize bias by hiding one's personal view and subjectivity. For example, the question 'Do you think that punishment may affect the learners in a negative way?' is a biased question.

The Interview

An interview refers to a conversation between the researcher and the informant. There are three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured.

The Interview

The structured interview takes the form of an oral questionnaire. It requires all the respondents to answer the same questions which have the same wording. Thus, it follows the format of a questionnaire but it is administered orally. The semi-structured interview involves an outline of the topics that will be discussed. Therefore, the interviewer asks questions without following a specific order and wording. The unstructured interview takes the form of a general discussion since the researcher just explains the research topic to the interviewee who has to provide his/her opinion about it.

The Interview

The interview is useful for gathering information about opinions and attitudes. The structured interview may be used for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. On the other hand, the semi-structured and unstructured interviews provide qualitative data. The interview relies more on open-ended questions; it is time consuming and may introduce bias.

The Interview

When designing an interview, one should follow these instructions:

- Think about the type of interview that should be selected and the issue that has to be tackled.
- Prepare the questions or the outline in advance.
- When meeting the interviewee, start with an oral introduction involving the greeting, the request for the consent of the respondent and the purpose of the interview.
- Avoid questions that increase bias and make the interviewee feel at ease.

The Interview

While listening to the interviewee, the interviewer should take notes or record the speech of the informant. However, recording should not be employed without the permission of the interviewee. Thus, note-taking remains the best method for keeping data.

Observation

Observation is a means of collecting information by watching people's attitudes and behaviour or events and settings. Classroom observation concerns the elicitation of events and interactions happening in the classroom. There are various types of observation.

Types of observation according to the degree of the involvement of the observer:

This category includes: participant and non participant observation. Participant observation implies that the observer is involved in the situation as he/she takes part in the activities or interactions under investigation. On the other hand, non participant observation means that the observer does not participate in the observed situation.

Types of observation depending on the organization or format of observation:

This group refers to structured and unstructured observation. Structured observation which is also called systematic observation relies on the use of an observation schedule as the researcher employs a set of techniques for observing. However, unstructured observation does not involve an observation schedule.

Types of observation according to research ethics:

This category includes overt and covert observation. Overt observation means that the observed persons know that they are observed. Covert observation implies that the observer is concealed as the observed persons do not know that they are observed.

Observation

Types of observation depending on the nature of the observed situation:

This category involves uncontrolled and controlled observation. Uncontrolled observation which is also called simple observation means that the researcher does not influence the observed people and observation takes place in a natural setting. On the other hand, controlled observation which is also called contrived observation implies that observation takes place according to a specific plan as the researcher influences the observed persons or situation.

Observation

When using observation as a research instrument, the researcher has to decide about the person(s) who should be observed, the object of observation, the time and place of observation in addition to the type of observation involved. Also, he/she has to think about the way of recording observation. The researcher may simply take notes or he/she may employ checklists or rating scales. He/she can opt for a combination of these instruments. Sometimes, recorders and videos may be utilized to record observation.

References

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- Lodico, Marguerite G., Spaulding Dean T. and Voegtle, Katherine H. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice*. USA: Jossey -Bass.