
DESIGNING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE INFORMATION REQUIRED BY A STUDY

Numer G. Escalante. Jr.^[1]

^[1]Isabela State University, Cauayan City

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the writer shares his experience and knowledge gained from the experience of preparing for data collection for a master's thesis in Sociology at Xavier University. Discussion includes the following: how the student arrived at the decision to construct his own questionnaire as the main instrument of data gathering;; how the questionnaire was planned, designed, and organized; the order with which these questions appeared in the questionnaire; how each question was worded, formulated and/or discriminated, etc. This paper also highlights the challenges of research instrument design even under the mentorship of a highly esteemed scholar like the world renowned late Francis C. Madigan, S. J. Despite the challenges in the task of design and construction, the process is a necessary and worthwhile experience.

Keywords: *designing questionnaire, information*

INTRODUCTION

Directing energies to gather information for a research question can be difficult especially for a beginning researcher when he decides to develop his / her own instrument or tool. It is for this reason that this paper is designing a data collection tool or instrument, a literature review is very helpful^[1].

This paper shares the experience of the writer in designing one of the commonly used methods in data collection in social research, namely, the questionnaire^[8]. The questionnaire was preferred over interview and observation methods of collecting the information he needed to discover whether religion contributes to the shaping of human experience in one particular but very important aspect of society, namely, concern and involvement in the distributive and social justice cases. If religion does so contribute, the researcher's further concern was to see whether diverse belief systems produce differences in the behavior of specific individuals in relation to other men and in relation to self – help or action projects^[2].

A further problem suggested by the preceding discussion is whether a person who believes in a God who is one, personal, all powerful, all good, omnipotent, and who is actively interested in the moral quality of man's daily life, will feel greater responsibility, obligation, and duty to benefit the common good. This common good can either be manifested in the role he plays in development

projects to liberate neighbors and fellowmen caught in oppressive structures and the help he extends to persons caught in serious need.

A second related problem is whether persons who believe in such a God, through development activities or projects actually participate in work for the common good of neighbors and fellowmen and attempt to help them in time of need, to a measurably greater extent than persons with different beliefs about God, including persons who do not believe in God's existence at all.

The above discussion provided the student researcher a way to figure out the information that he needed to answer research questions which he found to be in line with the thought of who suggested that questionnaire design should begin by specifying the information required for the questions asked by the researcher^[3].

METHODOLOGY

No single method is applicable in all studies^[6]. Of the three commonly used methods, the questionnaire approach was preferred over the interview and observation methods.

The choice of questionnaire method over other methods was based on the following reasons. First the researcher, at time of thesis writing, was a graduate student, university lecturer – instructor, and

research assistant for the late Dr. Francis C. Madigan, S. J. Second, the respondents were college students of Xavier University and can therefore read and follow instructions. Third, the questionnaire was found a very convenient tool to use for data collection within very limited time Fourth, the questionnaire method was found cheaper to use than the other methods. The questionnaire as data gathering tool proved the most practical and effective choice.

The problem of non-response which is one of the difficulties posed by the questionnaire was anticipated by devising a follow-up technique which, in this case, was to personally see and remind the respondents about returning filled out questionnaires at least twice to a designated place in the university.

As in all researches, the study required a schedule design. The researcher constructed his own which was deemed necessary due to the non-availability of other sources of data such as original documents or records.

Designing And Constructing The Questionnaire For The Study

Before the final instrument or questionnaire was pre-tested and used, unstructured interviews were done with neighbors, students, businessmen and individuals with varied religious beliefs or membership. Results of these interviews then formed the basis for judging what relevant issues must be included in the questionnaire. This process was called for considering that the research was first of its kind and therefore exploratory in design that was interested in generating knowledge and / hypotheses as output or product of the study [7]. Thus using the same categories of people, preliminary interviews revealed that the inclusion of cases such as foreign students and people with varied social backgrounds did not yield different responses to questions regarding important questions. In other words, analysis of responses to preliminary questions showed that foreign or non-foreign, people of low status or people of high status or people with varied cultural backgrounds shared similar experiences and attitudes.

From the research's inception, the researcher considered what questions should be included in his research instrument. Upon the suggestion of his

mentor he made sure that his questions are relevant to the research problem and that all unnecessary questions, those that do not satisfy the research objectives should be eliminated through a continuous process of assessment^[4]. The researcher ensured that the sequence of topics or problems included in the study was logically arranged. As in most research instruments, the questionnaire tailored for the main concern of the study was decided by the student to begin with an introduction (Peterson, 1999), a set of instructions to explain the purpose of the research and to clarify how the respondent should fill out the questionnaire. Personal information about the respondents was included for profiling purposes.

The next question was about the belief systems of the respondents. It contained questions on beliefs in God or gods, the concept of God or gods, belief in life after death, and belief in spirits (folk type). From this, the student was able to classify or categorize his respondents as monotheists, polytheists, agnostics or skeptics, atheists, syncretic and so forth.

The second set of questions centered on the reaction of respondents towards their fellowmen. Measurement was made on their attitudes towards friends, relatives, enemies; towards beggars, squatters, and indigent persons; towards persons other than friends and relatives but not enemies; finally towards social action projects and the nature of participation in the projects.

The third question asked for the participant's interest in knowing the extent of poverty in Cagayan de Oro City which, at time of the study, referred to 1974.

The fourth question asked the nature of the respondent's past experience/s in providing relief or assistance work to needy families and individuals. The questions were particularly designed to discover whether the past experience/s of the respondents in helping the poor was through organizations, private work, or only through chance contacts.

The fifth question inquired about the respondent's awareness of facts regarding provision of relief or assistance work to the poor by agencies like the city, the churches, and other organizations. Questions

were so designed to measure the knowledge of the respondents regarding provision of relief or assistance by said agencies.

The sixth question centered around the respondent's reaction to a proposed Citizens' Committee for the improvement of the lot of the poor families which would be set up permanently in Cagayan de Oro City. An explanation or example was asked to make the respondent's answer/s clearer.

The final question was intended to determine the commitment and the nature of this commitment to take part in the provision of relief or assistance to the poor families and persons in Cagayan de Oro City in case a Citizens' Committee will be formed or created. This was ultimately concluded with a request for those who expressed commitment to join the proposed committee to write their name and complete address and submit this to the student so they can be contacted in case the said Citizens' Committee will be organized.

Measuring belief systems relative to God/s, spirits, Life on Earth and in heaven

One major concern of the student – researcher was the method of collecting the data or information required by the study. After ruling out the use of observation and interview methods, the student concentrated all his efforts on the questionnaire and how it will best measure the belief systems, awareness, concern, and involvement of his respondents.

The student's first main concern was the measurement of belief systems in non-traditional ways like religiosity as determined by religious affiliation, frequency of attendance to mass, the act of praying, and the like. He wanted to ask questions that would elicit differentiations among the respondents' held beliefs about God and other super – and preter – natural beings as well as life after death.

For this, the student, upon the direction of his most able mentor, the late Francis C. Madigan S. J., Ph. D., listed a series of statements (approximately 25 statements) each of which expresses an idea or belief about God and / or life here and after. This procedure was intended to develop some kind of an opinionnaire to measure the respondents' belief/s. Each statement

requested the respondents to indicate whether they agree or disagree with a dichotomous format to each statement (Martin, 2006; Seymour, et. al., 1983).

The pretest of these statements required each of thirty respondents in and outside of Xavier University to place an x mark or a check (/) mark in boxes which represent ideas and beliefs which he agrees or disagrees with. This instruction was also used during the final administration of the questionnaire.

After data gathering from tryout respondents, answers were analyzed for inconsistencies per individual respondent then as a whole to find out which statement the respondents found confusing or unclear. These statements were then revised for simplification and clarification before they were returned to the respondents for verification. Statements that were found vague or confusing were dropped from the list of twenty five statements. This process resulted to a reduced number of 14 statements that were included in the questionnaire. These positively and negatively constructed statements included the following:

- I believe that God exists.
- I do not believe in a personal God. I believe God is a force that cannot think, cannot choose and cannot plan.
- I believe that all beings including myself are parts of God so that He and I are the same being.
- My sensations and feelings deceive me because they make me think that I am different from God. I believe that I am different from God.
- I do not believe in the personal existence for men in the next life. Nothing with continue to exist except God. Everything else will become God.
- I believe in one supreme God.
- I believe that there are two (or more) supreme (or very great) Gods vastly more powerful than men, who can control the forces of nature and inflict good or harm upon men.
- Although I believe in only one supreme God, I also believe that there are many spirits (like tumaos, engkantos, anitos, agtas, etc.) who have great powers to help or harm man.
- I believe in two (or more) supreme gods and also in the existence of many spirits (tumaos, engkantos, anitos, etc.) who have power to help and harm man.

- Although I do not believe in a supreme God, I believe in many spirits who have powers to help and harm man.
- I do not believe in an all powerful God.
- I believe this present life on earth is the only life of man. There is no other life after death.
- I believe God is too great to be bothered with small things, and because of this, He cannot pay attention to the everyday activities of each man.
- I believe God is interested in the acts of every man. While He is merciful and forgiving, He will reward the good intended and will punish the evil intended in each act.

Questions to gather the reaction of participants towards fellowmen

It is important to note that the study's main interest was to discover whether or not a relationship exists between belief systems and social concern and involvement. If such a relationship exists, do varied types of religious beliefs also tend to produce different social attitudes among the participants. This was referred to by the researcher as the social dimension of belief systems.

Several questions relating to current social issues, poverty and the problem of carrying out community projects were asked of each respondent. The questions were classified along three social dimensions. These were the following: 1) respondents' social awareness of the poor, about their existence in places like Cagayan de Oro, and about the assistance provided to poor or disadvantaged families or persons; 2) respondents' social attitudes or social concern of respondents towards various kinds of people, namely, friends, relatives, enemies, beggars and others, and towards action projects; and 3) respondents' willingness to be socially involved in programs directly engaged in providing work or money or other kinds of assistance to the poor.

For an evaluation of social attitudes, the study considered asking questions relating to specific groups. Questions were so designed to elicit the verbally expressed concern of respondents towards different members and segments of society such as friends, relatives, enemies, beggars, squatters, indigents, persons other than friends, and relatives but not enemies.

Several queries were used to set the stage. The question of real interest to the researcher was that which specifically asked each respondent whether he/she should always try to be helpful and generous to every person, not just to friends and relatives. Thus, using the summative ratings developed by Rensis Likert (1932), respondents were asked for their closest opinion by agreeing, agreeing more than disagreeing, disagreeing more than agreeing, or by simply disagreeing on each of the following questions or statements:

- We should always try to be helpful and generous to our friends.
- We should always try to be helpful and generous to our relatives.
- We should always try to be helpful and generous to every person, not just to friends and relatives.
- We should not do well to enemies (unless they become friends). Doing good to them may strengthen their bad intention towards us, and they may take advantage of us.
- The city should be cleared of beggars, squatters, and indigent persons by sending them elsewhere (back to where they came from if newly arrived, etc.). Persons like them are a source of crime.

In addition, a question was included to determine the respondents' attitude to social action projects, and towards the nature of participation in similar projects: Bayanihan projects should be completely voluntary and nobody who does not want to participate in them should feel that he has failed in any obligations, religious or civic.

Questions for determining Social Awareness

This portion of the questionnaire is to determine the respondents' awareness of the truth of and extent of poverty among families and persons in Cagayan de Oro City. This part also covers real conditions of assistance to the needy families and persons by various agencies in Cagayan de Oro City. Two sets of statements were constructed and designed for the respondents to reveal his or her knowledge of the extent of poverty in the city and of the assistance extended by such agencies as the city, churches, and other organizations to families and persons in dire need.

A question concerning familiarity with problems of the poor was also constructed to determine the respondents' level of knowledge about the extent of families in dire need in Cagayan de Oro City. This query began with the following:

- Because of the growth of Philippine cities, the government and the media have given extensive attention to squatters, and to poverty problems. The following topic was, therefore, selected as important for study.

Needy Families

The participants' social awareness was further evaluated through a set of questions which probed their knowledge about the provision of relief services and/or of assistance work to the needy families and individuals. These questions were asked against the commonplace observation that poor families and individuals are inadequately provided for in Cagayan de Oro by the city, churches, and other organizations. Each of these questions or statements was discriminated by words ranging from very adequate to very inadequate provision of assistance to the needy families or persons. With this in mind, the student came up with the following statements for the respondents to select the closest representation of what they know of the social issue:

- The city, the churches, and other organizations in Cagayan de Oro are providing very adequately for the assistance of such needy families and persons.
- The city, the churches, and other organizations in Cagayan de Oro are providing adequately for the assistance of such needy families and persons.
- The city, the churches, and other organizations in Cagayan de Oro are not providing adequately for the assistance of such needy families and persons.
- The city, the churches, and other organizations in Cagayan de Oro are providing very inadequately for the assistance of such needy.

Questions about involvement in helping the poor

At this stage of questionnaire construction, the main concern was to determine the commitment (past and present) of respondents to work for the benefit of the underprivileged or disadvantaged families and persons in Cagayan de Oro city. This particular concern called for a reevaluation of the respondents'

social attitudes and social awareness in the light of their social involvement.

The first set of questions developed for this purpose was designed such that a survey of the respondents' past involvement with the poor is carried by the research. Each respondent was asked to report in general at least one or more personal experience/s where he/she had participated in something that has to do with the welfare of the needy. Seven statements about the possible experiences that the respondents may have in working with needy families were formulated. The statements were carefully formulated such that each description is different from the other. Respondents were then asked to indicate with a check mark on the description that comes closest to his or her experience/s with the poor sector of the population. The idea of asking these questions was to gather or know from verbal self – reports of respondents if the past experience/s of the respondents with the poor included: 1) having worked privately or through an organization, or 2) only through occasional contacts. Thus the descriptive statements include the following:

- I have been employed for one year or more in an organization directly engaged in work with the poor and with needy people.
- I have regularly for one year in a voluntary (non – pay) organization directly engaged in work with the poor and the needy.
- I have worked for less than a year, or not regularly, in an organization like the one referred to above in work with the poor and the needy.
- I have regularly but privately worked for a year or more with the poor and needy.
- I have worked regularly but privately for less than a year with the poor and needy.
- I have worked privately a good bit but not regularly nor for as long as a year with the poor and needy.
- My experience with the poor and needy has mostly been through occasional contacts with them, for example, like a family head asking for help or families I have found out about from chance contacts.

Measuring commitment of respondents to help/assist the needy families or persons

This portion of the questionnaire was carefully designed to measure not just the respondents' verbal commitment but also the nature of commitment that

they are willing to provided to help / assist needy families or persons in Cagayan de Oro through a proposed Citizens' Committee. The set of questions prepared for this purpose was centered on a proposed Citizens' Committee for improving the lot of the poor which, as presented to the respondents, would be permanently established in Cagayan de Oro City. The intent of doing this was to determine who among the respondents would like to get involved in the provision for needy families and persons in the city. This was also to check who among those who are aware and concerned about the needy would like to get involved, the nature of their involvement in a proposed Citizens' Committee that will be created specifically for that purpose.

The participants were guided to read carefully and check the statement/s about commitment to help/assist needy families and persons that are closest to their views and opinions. This was accompanied by an introductory statement which said: 'If a voluntary Citizens's Committee to assist needy families and persons can be set up in Cagayan de Oro City' what will the respondent's do? For this purpose, a set of ten statements were carefully worded:

- I am willing to give at least one hour of my time each week to work with this Committee and I am willing to make small regular donations of money in accordance with my means.
- I am willing to give one hour of my time each week with this Committee and perhaps I will be willing to make regular small donations in accordance with my means.
- I would not like to be obligated to giving time regularly to work with this Committee but I am willing to make regular small donations in accordance with my means.
- I am willing occasionally to give time and/or small donations to the work of this Citizens' Committee but would not like to be obliged to regular obligations of either time or money.
- I would not like at the present to any that I will give the time or financial assistance to this work with the poor although I recognize it as a very worthy undertaking. But I may decide to give time or financial assistance later on.
- I am not inclined at present to give my time or financial assistance to the work of this Committee.

- I am disinclined to give time or financial assistance to this project and I do not expect that my future reactions to it will change.
- I am not in favor of this project and therefore I will not give time and/or financial support.
- I am definitely against this project and feel it would be unwise to organize it. I will oppose it if it is organized.

On top of this, the participants were asked to explain their answer and give actual examples, if possible, for the purpose of clarity.

Questioning to measure sincerity of respondents to become a part of the proposed citizens' committee for the welfare of the poor families and individuals in Cagayan De Oro City

The test of sincerity given to participants who had verbally made claims of commitment involves asking them to submit their names and addresses to the proposed committee which they have previously alleged to support with their labor, their financial assistance or both. Their approval of any of the first four statements became bases for the next step which was the submission of their contact information. More precisely, the final question on the willingness of the respondents who verbally expressed to get involved in the provision of assistance and / or help to the families and persons in dire need in Cagayan de Oro City through a proposed Citizens' Committee proceeded with the following:

'... Kindly write your name and complete address on a half sheet of paper (or smaller piece if you like) and hand this to me separately so that when we attempt to organize such a committee, we can then contact you.'

Few final comments

Research or thesis and dissertation writing requires careful planning of the data gathering method, choice of good mentor, etc. In this paper, the student – researcher emphasized the contribution of a very seasoned researcher and writer as his mentor. The mentor is a prolific writer of research reports and articles. He wrote for the American Journal of Sociology, Demography, Population Index or Studies, Philippine Sociological Review, and several other venues where

useful insights and knowledge can be disseminated to larger and/or bigger audience or, even, used as required reading materials for Sociology, Population or Demography students enrolled in big universities in the United States of America and Europe. This same mentor also wrote books namely, *The Farmer Said No, Birth and Deaths in Cagayan de Oro*, and various papers presented along with his research associates and students in various international, national, local trainings, conferences and conventions like the East – West Summer Seminars on Population, annual conventions of the International Union of Social Sciences and Population, etc.

The said mentor was instrumental in guiding the student to strategize data collection particularly on the aspects pertaining to social awareness, social concern, and involvement, and determining the belief systems of his respondents. The sets of questions were so organized to take a funnel form with a two – stage filtering feature screening those who are socially aware of the extent poverty in Cagayan de Oro City from those who said that they have some experience/s in the past in the provision of assistance to the same sector of the population of the said city. The design also worked to obtain verbal expressions of the respondents' concern and commitment to a socially oriented action.

Overall, questionnaire construction done in the manner just presented proved to be a worthwhile undertaking for its effectiveness in measuring the sincerity of the socially aware and concerned respondents about the poor of the city and urging their involvement in development work for this sector of the population.

References

[1] Ali, Shaukat. (2011). Lecture. Bilkent University. Turkey.

[2] Escalante, Numeriano. (January 1977). An Exploratory Study upon the Behavioral Aspects of Various Types of Social Attitudes, Awareness, and Involvement in Relation to Religious Beliefs, Outlooks, and Conceptualizations of Xavier University Students, 1975-1976. (Thesis).

[3] Ghauri, P., Granhaug, K. and Kristianslund, I., (1995), *Research Methods in Business Studies: A Practical Guide*, Prentice Hall, Hemel Hempstead.

[4] Gill, J. and Johnson, P., (1991), *Research Methods*, Paul Chapman, London.

[5] Hopkins, Will. (2008). *Research Designs: Choosing and Fine-tuning a Design for Your Study*. Auckland, New Zealand.

[6] Likert, Rensis. (1932). *A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes*: New York.

[7] Lynch, Frank, et.al. (1974). *Data Gathering by Social Survey*. PSSC Social Survey Series 2. Philippine Social Science Council, Inc. Quezon City.

[8] Martin, Elizabeth (2006). *Survey Questionnaire*. Research Report Series: Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, California,