



16: SCHEDULE- A TOOL/ TECHNIQUE OF DATA COLLECTION

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16.0 Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to understand and learn about:

- Schedule: Meaning and Definition.
- Characteristics of schedule.
- Types of schedules.
- Importance of schedules in social research.
- Merits and demerits.

16.1 Meaning and Definitions of Schedule

Schedule is one of the most popularly utilized techniques for gathering information in a research survey. This technique for information collection is like the assortment of information through questionnaires, but it is being filled by the enumerators or researchers / field workers who are delegated for inquiry. But in specific circumstances, schedules may be given over to respondents and at that time, enumerators help them in recording their responses to different questions in the schedules. Enumerators / field workers clarify the aims of the research and eliminate the confusions in which any respondents may feel incomprehension of specific questions or the definition or concepts of troublesome terms.

Schedule is a set of questions, open ended or closed, prepared for use by an interviewer in a face to face, by telephone or by other electronic media. It is a research tool / instrument for collecting data being filled in by the enumerators or field workers who are specially appointed for this purpose. In other words, it is nothing more than a list of questions which are necessary to test a particular hypothesis.

It is a device in social research which is most frequent used in collecting field data specially, where the survey method is employed. Sometimes it is used to organized observation and interview so some of the social scientists called it interview schedule. It contains questions and blank tables which are to be filled by the investigators themselves after getting information from the respondents. It is a list of questions, which assists in the collection of data or requisite first-hand information. In this method, the researcher or the investigator or the field worker himself presents the list of the questions to the respondents.



Definitions of Schedule

In the words of G.A. Lundberg the schedule ensures that the observer makes note at the same items at information in all the cases and yet makes it unnecessary for him to just his memory for the facts observed (Lundberg 1942).

P.V. Young defined schedule as it is counting device, used in formal and standardized inquires the sole purpose of which is aiding in the collection of quantitative cross-sectional data (Young 1975).

Definition of schedule as given by Goode and Hatt a schedule is the name usually applied to a set of questions which are asked and filled by an interviewer, in face-to-face situation with other persons (Goode and Hatt 1952).

On the basis of above definition, a scheduled represents a formal method for securing facts that are in objective form and easily discernible. It is the Performa containing a set of questions being filled in by the enumerator who are specially appointed for this purpose. In other words, it is nothing more than a list of questions which are necessary to test a particular hypothesis.

16.2 Characteristics of Schedule

In social research, a schedule is a structured tool used for data collection, typically administered by an interviewer. The key characteristics that define a schedule are as follows-

- 1. A Structured Format:** Schedules consist of a fixed set of questions prepared in advance. This ensures that every respondent is asked the same questions in the same order. The use of a standardized format allows for uniformity in the data collected, facilitating comparison and analysis.
- 2. Interviewer Administration:** An interviewer administers the schedule, asking questions directly to the respondent and recording their answers. Interviewers need to be trained to ensure they understand the questions and can handle the interview process effectively, including probing for more information when necessary.
- 3. Face-to-Face Interaction:** Schedules are typically used in face-to-face settings, allowing interviewers to observe non-verbal cues and clarify any misunderstandings immediately. The interviewer can adapt to the respondent's pace and needs, ensuring that questions are understood and answered comprehensively.
- 4. Flexibility in Probing:** While the core questions are standardized, interviewers have the flexibility to ask follow-up questions or probe deeper based on the respondent's answers. Interviewers can provide explanations or clarifications if respondents do not understand a question.
- 5. Comprehensive Data Collection:** The ability to ask follow-up questions and probe allows for the collection of detailed and nuanced data. Interviewers



can capture contextual and environmental information that might be relevant to the study.

6. Recording Responses: Interviewers record responses directly, reducing the risk of misinterpretation that can occur with self-administered questionnaires. Responses are captured in real-time, which can improve the accuracy and reliability of the data.

7. Targeted Sampling: Schedules can be used to target specific populations or groups, allowing researchers to focus on particular segments of interest. The controlled nature of the interview setting helps in ensuring that the right respondents are selected and that the data collected is relevant.

8. Ethical Considerations: Respondents are informed about the study, its purpose, and their role, and their consent is obtained before proceeding. Measures are taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents' information.

9. Time and Resource Intensive: Administering schedules requires more time and resources compared to self-administered questionnaires, including the need for trained interviewers and potentially longer interview times. Coordinating face-to-face interviews can be logistically complex, especially in large-scale studies or geographically dispersed areas.

Schedules are a powerful tool in social research, providing structured yet flexible means of data collection through interviewer-administered surveys. Their key characteristics include a structured format, interviewer administration, face-to-face interaction, flexibility in probing, comprehensive data collection, accurate recording of responses, targeted sampling, and a focus on ethical considerations. Despite being resource-intensive, the depth and reliability of data collected through schedules make them invaluable in many research contexts.

16.9 Types of Schedules

Schedules are used in different situations in social science / sociological research. Depending on these situations' schedules may be categorized differently by different research methodologists:

G. A Lundberg: There are three main types of schedules, but these types are not exclusive, because there are several schedules which can be placed in two or more classes.

1. Schedule for the recording of objective facts.

(a) From the direct observation of the investigator.

(b) From interviews with people who possess the desired facts.

(c) From questionnaire filled out by the people without personal interview by an investigator.



2. Schedule for the determination and measurement of attitude and opinion.

3. Schedule for scoring the status and functions of social organizations and institutions.

P. V. Young:

1. **Structured Schedule:** A structured schedule consists of a predetermined set of questions that are administered in a fixed order. The questions are standardized and often have closed-ended response options.

2. **Semi-Structured Schedule:** A semi-structured schedule combines predetermined questions with flexibility for the interviewer to explore certain topics in more depth. It allows for probing and follow-up questions.

3. **Unstructured Schedule:** An unstructured schedule provides a general framework or topic guide for the interview, but the specific questions and the order in which they are asked are not predetermined. It allows for free-flowing conversation.

4. **Rating Schedule:** A rating schedule involves respondents assigning ratings or scores to various items or statements based on predefined criteria or scales. It quantifies subjective evaluations.

5. **Checklist Schedule:** A checklist schedule involves systematically recording the presence or absence of specific behaviors, characteristics, or events. It typically consists of a list of items to be observed.

Goode and Hatt

Goode and Hatt in their seminal work *Methods in Social Research*, outlined various types of schedules used in social research. The types of schedules according to Goode and Hatt are-

1. **Structured Schedule:** A structured schedule consists of a predetermined set of questions that are administered in a fixed order. The questions are standardized and often have closed-ended response options.

2. **Semi-Structured Schedule:** A semi-structured schedule combines predetermined questions with flexibility for the interviewer to explore certain topics in more depth. It allows for probing and follow-up questions.

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Common Classification of Schedule:

- **Observation Schedule:** The foundation of such types of schedules is observation. Such a type of schedule is used to supplement the data collection along with observation technique. Researchers collect the data with the help of this schedule through observation.
- **Interview Schedule:** The schedule which is used for the collection of information through interview is called as interview schedule. This is one of the most frequently used schedules in comparison to another schedule.
- **Document Schedule:** This is the schedule used to record the information, which is contained in various documents such as life histories, diaries, letters, files, books, diaries, etc. For application of such schedule, it is important to collect more and more records for documentation.
- **Evaluation Schedule / Institution Survey Schedule:** This schedule is generally used by organizations or institutions to measure the problems faced by the same and their performance or evaluate their programme relating to a particular activity. Such a schedule is constructed for the study of a particular aspect of a particular institution or organization. Generally, such a type of schedule is big in comparison to other schedules.
- **Rating Survey Schedule:** Such type of schedule is frequently used in sociology, psychology, and social work. It is used when there is a need for rating. By using this it is determined which factors determine a particular phenomenon. Such as- what are the psychological elements of happy marital life? Institution is working wrong.

Importance of Schedule as a Research Tool

As questionnaire as its strengths and weaknesses this technique of data collection has its strengths and weaknesses also. These are as follows-

1. **Efficient Resource Management:** Research projects often involve multiple resources, including time, money, and human resources. A well-planned schedule ensures that these resources are utilized efficiently, minimizing waste.
2. **Meeting Deadlines:** Social research projects typically have deadlines imposed by funding bodies, academic institutions, or other stakeholders. A



schedule helps researchers stay on track to meet these deadlines, ensuring the completion of the project timely.

3. **Data Collection Coordination:** Many social research projects involve data collection from multiple sources, such as surveys, interviews, or observations. A schedule helps coordinate these activities, ensuring that data collection is conducted in a systematic and timely manner.

4. **Quality Control:** A well-defined schedule allows researchers to allocate sufficient time for each stage of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This helps maintain the quality of the research by preventing rushed or haphazard work.

5. **Minimizing Bias:** Adhering to a schedule helps minimize the influence of biases on the research process. By following a pre-determined plan, researchers are less likely to deviate from the intended methodology or analysis, reducing the risk of bias in the results.

6. **Facilitating Collaboration:** In collaborative research projects involving multiple researchers or research teams, a schedule serves as a roadmap for coordination and communication. It helps ensure that everyone involved is aware of their responsibilities and timelines, facilitating smooth collaboration.

7. **Risk Management:** A schedule allows researchers to identify potential risks or obstacles to the research process and plan accordingly. By anticipating challenges and allocating resources appropriately, researchers can mitigate risks and ensure the successful completion of the project.

8. With the help of a schedule authentic and desired information can be collected. According to G. A. Lundberg- the schedule tends to standardize and objectify the observation of different observers (Lundberg, 1942).

9. Schedule is more useful in in-depth research. As G. A. Lundberg writes- the schedule is a device for isolating one element at a time and thus intensifying our observation (Lundberg, 1942).

16.5 Merits and Demerits of Schedule

As questionnaire as its strengths and weaknesses this technique of data collection has its strengths and weaknesses also. These are as follows:

Merits of Schedule

Strengths of the schedule can be concluded as:

- Schedule is considered one of the best techniques of data collection as it involves the quality of interview, questionnaire, and observation also. As P. V. Young writes- he (researcher) makes the schedule a guide, a means of delimiting the scope of his enquiry, a memory-tickler, a recording device (Young 1975).
- Collecting information through schedule, the response rate is always higher. Schedule has no problem of incomplete responses as the questionnaire has.
- If there is any difficulty in front of respondents, researchers / field worker is present to illustrate questions.



- With the help of schedule, a wide range of information can be collected.
- Schedule is a tool which is used to collect information from all types of respondents- illiterate or literate, old or young, male, or female etc.
- With the help of a schedule authentic and desired information can be collected. According to G. A. Lundberg- the schedule tends to standardize and objectify the observation of different observers (Lundberg 1942).
- Schedule is more useful in in-depth research. As G. A. Lundberg writes- the schedule is a device for isolating one element at a time and thus intensifying our observation (Lundberg 1942).

Demerits of Schedule

The following are the weaknesses of the schedule:

- Schedule is more expensive techniques of data collection as researcher himself, or the field worker goes to the respondent and collects information from the respondents.
- When data is collected with the help of schedule, there is a need for the administrative and organization machinery.
- Since researchers or field workers go to the respondents, they make face-to-face interaction with respondents while collecting information. So, it requires large number of field workers.
- While collecting information from the respondents' field workers are present there. These field workers may be influenced by the respondents.
- Researcher or field worker goes to every individual respondent to get answers in the schedule. So, it is not appropriate for a large number of respondents scattered in a wide geographical area.
- It is costly in comparison to other techniques of data collection as researchers or field workers go to the individual respondent to collect information.
- It is time taking techniques of data collection because data is collected after making face to face interaction with respondents.

16.6 Summing Up

A schedule is an essential tool in social research used for the systematic collection of data through direct interaction between the researcher and respondents. It consists of a series of structured, pre-determined questions designed to gather consistent and comparable information across different participants. The schedule ensures uniformity in the data collection



process, which helps minimize interviewer bias and variability, leading to more reliable and valid results. This tool can be administered through various methods, including face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, or online questionnaires, providing flexibility in data collection approaches. The structured format of a schedule is particularly beneficial for quantitative research, enabling easy analysis and identification of patterns and trends.

16.7 References and Suggested Further Readings

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