Mission Report

Short Course on Questionnaire Design and Testing

29-30 May 2013
2nd Floor, UNESCO Meeting room

Prepared by
Ms Supansa Kajavong, PO2

A. SEAMEO Officials and Staff Member on Mission

1. Dr Handoko, DDPD
2. Ms Supansa Kajavong, PO2

B. Background, Description and Objectives of the Activity

The workshop is facilitated by Dr Pamela Campanelli. Dr Campanelli is from the UK and is an independent consultant. She has worked at the University of Michigan and has worked with the UK census bureau. Further information on her background can be obtained from the following link: http://www.thesurveycoach.com/campanelli_surveycoach.html Ms Qingzi (Carrie) Gong, APEID UNESCO, met with Dr Campanelli during an ICT workshop and invited Dr Campanelli to give the short course for UNESCO participants and extended the invitation for 2 participants from SEAMEO Secretariat to join the course and learn on questionnaire design and testing.

1. The objectives are as follows:
    1.1. To increase participants' understanding of a good questionnaire design and good practices
    1.2. To enable participants to critique existing survey questions and questionnaires
    1.3. To provide participants with knowledge to be able to create own high quality surveys.

C. Participants

1. UNESCO participants (mostly from APEID Unit, but also from other units such as APPEAL, IKM, CI, EPR, ESD)
2. SEAMEO participants

D. Organizer/s

1. APEID Unit – Ms Qingzi (Carrie) Gong

E. Highlight of the Activity/Summary Points

1. Steps in surveys include:
   a. initial design - matching question wording to the concepts being measured – to be specific in the objective, consider the statistical analytic and reporting techniques to use that would be appropriate to the data being collected – to decrease the likelihood that critical items are left out, the excessive respondent burden if the questionnaire includes everything, and identify which topics are most critical to deserve more "space" in the instrument
   b. testing - pretest questionnaires and procedures to identify problems prior to the survey
   c. data collection
   d. data processing/management
   e. data analysis
   f. data report and dissemination - disclose all methods of the survey to permit evaluation and replication. Survey process and quality management need to be constantly monitored and fine-tuned.
2. Questionnaire design
   a. Wording – need to be further explored and developed, could cause wrong interpretations - even simple words like "last week" can be understood in different ways – also need to be short and simple.
   b. Long complex questions are better rearranged as a series of short simple questions but a multiple question could also lengthen the questionnaire
   c. Solution – test your questions if the terms are misunderstood – substitute a clearer word/concept or provide a short succinct definition
   d. Using examples to clarify a term could limit the frame of reference (for example, a different example can produce different answers).
   e. Solution – use a series of questions which avoid the problematic term altogether, use an open question (however, do not expect all respondents to give more details in an open question)
   f. Avoid complex questions, long questions, complex terms, concepts, acronyms or jargons, complex tasks such as having respondents do maths in their heads, avoid asking more than one question at a time (the use of "and" such as "would you like to be rich and famous?" when some people might want to be rich but not necessarily famous), avoid giving more than one answer category at a time, avoid question and answer category mismatch, questions that impose unwarranted assumptions ("where did you go on a holiday last year?"), clarify what is an adequate answer ("when did you move to this community?" Possible answers are 1953, when I was married, when I was 16 – so better "which year did you move").
   g. Beware of vague quantifies such as often, sometimes, rarely, never so alternatives would be the actual numbers (which would be more accurate), number ranges, approximate ranges (i.e. everyday, a few times a week, once a week, etc)
   h. Do not provide a middle category if you don't want a potential 20% of the respondents picking the middle category – depends on the objective of the question
   i. Beware early questions may affect later questions
   j. Avoid double negatives in statements
3. Open questions - Best for pretesting new topics, when there are too many possibilities to be closed, for complicated situations, to capture salient or unexpected information, however, good open questions are hard to write, often they are "too open"; they are time consuming and expensive – coding is laborious and tends to be unreliable; debate on which coding category to assign the answer to.
4. Ranking – demands concentration, and some items are equally important but they have to choose one for ranking, better to do rating for each item
5. "Tick all that apply" – to avoid primacy effect, better use "yes" "no" for each item

6. Agree/disagree questions – complex, respondents have to comprehend the statement, determine their own opinion, compare with the statement, and fit the result, prone to bias – agree to the statement regardless of its content – solution – better to ask directly about their opinions or provide a balanced format exploring all statements

7. Bipolar vs unipolar – bipolar scales reflect two opposing alternatives with a clear conceptual midpoint "i.e. very positive, generally positive, mixed, generally negative, very negative" – unipolar scales reflect varying levels with no conceptual midpoint and with a zero point at one end "very important, important, somewhat important, not important".

8. Numeric scales –every point does not need to be defined, but it is useful to label the midpoint

9. Satisfaction questions – "satisfied" might be interpreted as "acceptable in the circumstances" which is different from "good" – not useful to guide how the service can be improved – solution – ask a series of factual questions about specific elements of what was done and not done – another solution is to first ask about important then the experience of the issue to determine which aspect is important and if it is an issue to be addressed

10. Sensitive questions – respondents may distort answers if they think it is a threat, if they want to make themselves look good and maintain self image. Solution – assure "confidentiality" (different from "anonymity"), communicate reason for accuracy (why we need to ask these questions). Solution – supply comfortable context in the questions, use underreporting terms, minimize detail, ask towards the end, but not as the last question.

11. Questionnaire as a whole – include ID number, cover letter that describes what the survey is about and motivate people to participate, clear specific instructions on how to mark the answers (perhaps no need for "kindly" and "please" for every section, just in the introduction and use sub-headings), first questions should apply to everyone, easy to answer, connected to what the respondents understands as topic of the survey, and be a closed answer. There should be a meaningful order, short definitions (note: instruction booklets are rarely read), routing [i.e. Yes then arrow to the next question; No then arrow to (Skip to 28)], appropriate amount of write-in space for open questions, comments line space should be spacious, use short one or two word section labels that are eye catching, put question numbers, use complete numbers, avoid sub-parts/sub-numbering, need code numbers unless it is optically scanned or web survey, spread out the questions - do not cram, use sans serif font and 11 font size at least, not too long so 5-10 minutes to complete the survey, add a big "thank you" at the end, provide written instructions at the end on how to return the questionnaire.

12. For self completion questionnaires, need to be respondent friendly, consider booklet style, consistency in style, layout and task, de-emphasize things not relevant to the respondents, layout the page to follow natural eye movements so important things should be in the upper left hand corner, reverse print for question number to be catchy, bold for question stem, plain for answer categories, proximity – tick boxes should be next to those that should be answered. Shaded background for complex questionnaires to show all the answer spaces to be filled. Two columns are easier to the eyes.

13. Web-based survey – make sure respondents do not have to scroll right and down, just either, drop down boxes for a long list that has a natural ordering, color can convey unintended messages so use minimally, pictures can also affect results

14. Interviews – please refer to Workshop booklet

15. Question testing – forms appraisal (checklist) for every question, respondent debriefing questions (special follow up questions to determine respondents' understanding of the original survey question), cognitive interview (requires experts), focus groups (have them gathered, complete the questionnaires, look for patterns and debrief with respondents). Any form of question testing is better than none. Expert review –if consultation is too early, the project team may not have gotten far

enough to set up a well-focused discussion, but it is better to consult too early than too late.

16. As the workshop is mainly for questionnaire design and testing of the questionnaire, data analysis was not elaborated.

F. Appendices/Related Conference Materials and Outputs

Hardcopies of the Workshop booklet are with DDPD and PO2. One copy will be made for the library.