

² Allen G. Blezek. "A Study To Determine The Extent To Which Teacher Educators In Nebraska Are Incorporating Procedures For Planning And Conducting Career Education Programs Into Teacher Education Curriculums" Doctoral Dissertation. Lincoln: The University of Nebraska, 1973.

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USING TELEPHONE TO INCREASE
RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRES

Clifford L. Nelson
Agricultural and Extension Education
Gene C. Whaples
4-H and Youth Department

University of Maryland

A continuing problem in survey research is the need to ensure returns of questionnaires. Previous research has been extensively and recently reported so no attention will be given to that particular literature other than to note that 60% return is considered typical without special incentives for respondents.

Cognizant of many of the historical problems of response rates, University of Maryland Agricultural and Extension Education researchers have used the telephone to improve responses. Robinson¹, in his 1971 study of the communication processes of vocational education supervisors, arranged to conduct oral telephone interviews with county supervisors of vocational education by personally asking these people to cooperate after a letter was written describing the research project. Through this procedure he was able to obtain a 74% usable return of questionnaires.

The Robinson interview schedule was administered over long distance WATS telephone taking at least 15 minutes for discussion. The responses were recorded by the investigator and also coded on an interview schedule. It was his feeling that a similar level of response could only have been obtained through personal interview. The obvious savings in researcher time and travel allowed the project to be conducted more extensively and much more rapidly than could have been accomplished through personal interviews.

Faced with similar problems of travel and time to conduct field study, Whaples in 1974 used a telephone supplemented mail survey technique studying 4-H professionals in 12 Northeastern states regarding racial attitudes. From a population of 469 4-H professionals, the investigator randomly selected a sample of 130 to study. Before the questionnaire was mailed, the investigator personally called each of the professionals sampled telling them of the importance of the study. All agreed to participate. A cover letter, identifying the researcher as a 4-H Program Leader and again indicating the purpose and significance of the study, was mailed with the questionnaires. The letter

indicated a willingness to share the results with the participants. Only a few members of the randomly selected sample were employees of the University which was sponsoring the research. Within three weeks from the initial mailing of the questionnaire, 124 out of 130 subjects responded. A follow-up letter elicited 3 additional usable responses. All subjects but one responded. Therefore, a usable rate of 98% was achieved using this technique.

The response rate was of particular interest because of the definite racial overtones of half of the items on the questionnaires distributed. When the same questionnaire was personally administered to 395 adults attending a program at the National 4-H Center, a usable response rate of only 89% was achieved.

There is a definite indication that the use of the telephone to solicit participation, or to conduct actual interviews, in research studies can be very successful. Increasingly limited travel and research budgets require the use of new and innovative approaches to collect information.

Costs of long distance telephoning can be extensive. However, these costs are minimal when compared to costs related to researcher time and travel required to conduct an extensive personal interview survey. The phone technique was also particularly useful to double check demographic material collected from other sources and helpful to reduce the length of the mail questionnaire.

These results are secondary findings of research on other questions. Additional research (first contact-follow-up) dealing with telephone interviews and the use of the telephone to increase response to mail questionnaires is warranted. The use of a control group that would not receive the telephone contact would help to strengthen future research in this area. These initial results indicate that the telephone may prove to be a useful tool in increasing the level of response to questionnaires. It may also be a more economical approach to gathering data using an interview schedule.

FOOTNOTES

¹Robinson, Boyd F. Jr. "Gatekeepers in Vocational Education". Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Maryland 1971.