1.8 Researching Education: Methods in Context: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Unless the question asks for brief points, write your answers in full sentences. Allow about 30 minutes for this pack.

1 Describe two ways a researcher could improve the reliability of classroom observations when comparing teaching methods across different schools.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Explain two ways in which gaining gatekeeper permission from a headteacher can shape the focus and outcomes of research into classroom assessment practices.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that participant observation is the best method for researching pupil teacher relationships in secondary school classrooms.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

4 Identify and explain two ethical issues a researcher must consider when conducting face to face interviews with 15 year old pupils about bullying in a UK secondary school.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.8 Researching Education: Methods in Context: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies one way, e.g. use a standardised observation schedule or coding frame	**B1**
development, e.g. this ensures observers record the same behaviours in the same way	**B1**
identifies a second way, e.g. train multiple observers and check intercoder agreement	**B1**
development, e.g. regular reliability checks reduce observer bias and improve consistency	**B1**

Answer: Use a standardised observation schedule or coding frame so observers record the same behaviours consistently, and train multiple observers with intercoder checks so observer bias is reduced and consistency improved.

Question 2

identifies one way, e.g. headteacher can limit access to certain classes or teachers	**B1**
explains effect, e.g. this may bias the sample towards more cooperative teachers or particular year groups, affecting representativeness	**B1**
identifies a second way, e.g. headteacher may impose conditions such as times, data allowed, or removal of sensitive material	**B1**
explains effect, e.g. conditions can limit methods used, reduce depth of data or shape findings to be less critical	**B1**

Answer: A headteacher may limit access to certain classes or teachers, biasing the sample toward cooperative staff or particular year groups and reducing representativeness. They may also impose conditions on times, data allowed or removal of sensitive material, which can limit methods and depth of data and make findings less critical.

Question 3

Level 1 Simple statements about participant observation and one other method with little or no application to classroom examples, and no sustained evaluation.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some knowledge of participant observation and at least one alternative method, with limited application to classroom contexts and some evaluation, but analysis may be descriptive rather than balanced.	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear explanation of strengths and limitations of participant observation applied to classroom examples, balanced against alternative methods such as interviews or official statistics, with reasoned evaluation and acknowledgement of practical and ethical constraints.	**7-9**
Level 4 Detailed, well developed analysis showing understanding that views differ. Compares participant observation with other methods in context, discusses validity, reliability, access, ethics and theoretical perspectives, and reaches a supported conclusion on how far sociologists would agree.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- AO1 content: Participant observation involves the researcher participating in classroom life to gain insider understanding; can be overt or covert, full or peripheral participation.
- AO1 content: Alternative methods include non-participant observation, structured questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews, video recording, and analysis of official documents.
- AO2 application: Participant observation can reveal detailed, contextualised pupil teacher interactions, informal power dynamics and taken for granted practices that questionnaires or statistics miss, for example seeing how teachers give praise or reprimands in real time.
- AO2 application: Access issues in schools, gatekeeper permission and safeguarding may limit the use of participant observation; pupil vulnerability and consent make covert participation unethical in many school settings.
- AO3 analysis: Strengths include high validity, rich qualitative data, ability to observe non verbal interaction and routines, and discovering unexpected findings about relationships and classroom culture.
- AO3 analysis: Limitations include low reliability and replicability, risk of observer bias, time consuming nature, ethical problems with minors, and problems generalising from one class or school.
- AO3 analysis: Comparison with interviews and questionnaires, which can gather wider samples and more reliable or comparable data but may lack depth, and with official statistics which are useful for patterns but miss interactional detail.
- AO3 theoretical points: Interpretivist sociologists favour participant observation for understanding meanings and perspectives, while positivists prefer quantitative methods for generalisable patterns and objectivity.
- AO3 evaluation: Consider mixed methods as a compromise, triangulation to improve both validity and reliability, and context dependent judgements that participant observation may be best for some research questions but not for all.
- Conclusion: A balanced judgement about the extent of agreement, acknowledging participant observation is highly valued for depth and validity in studying relationships, but many sociologists would point to its practical and ethical limits and recommend combining methods.

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Question 4

identifies one ethical issue, e.g. obtaining informed consent from pupils and parents	**B1**
explains why, e.g. pupils under 16 are minors so parental consent or safeguarding procedures may be required	**B1**
identifies a second ethical issue, e.g. protecting pupils from harm or distress when discussing bullying	**B1**
explains why, e.g. interviews about bullying may trigger distress so the researcher must have support and referral procedures	**B1**

Answer: One ethical issue is obtaining informed consent from pupils and parents, because 15 year olds are minors and parental permission or school safeguarding procedures may be required. A second issue is protection from harm, since discussing bullying can cause distress so the researcher must provide support and referral routes.

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