



## GSOC.AL8 Researching Education: Methods in Context

AQA 7192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**Answer ALL questions. Unless the question asks for brief points, write your answers in full sentences.**  
**Allow about 75 minutes for this pack.**

- 1** Which one of the following best describes a non-participant observation used in classroom research in a UK secondary school?

- ☐ A) The researcher sits in the classroom and joins in group work with pupils
- ☐ B) The researcher watches lessons from the back of the room but does not take part
- ☐ C) The researcher interviews pupils after school about their homework
- ☐ D) The researcher asks teachers to complete a questionnaire about behaviour

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'participant observation' when researching pupils and classrooms in a school setting.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify and explain one practical problem of using structured questionnaires with Year 8 pupils in a state secondary school.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 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)

- 5** Describe one strength and one limitation of using official school documents, such as attendance records and exclusion logs, to study pupil behaviour in a secondary school.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** Item A: A researcher gains permission from the headteacher to study classroom interaction in a mixed ability Year 10 maths class. The researcher wishes to use video recording during lessons for later detailed analysis. The school requires parental consent forms to be returned and insists the researcher will not interview pupils during lesson time. Using Item A and your own knowledge, identify two practical constraints the researcher faces and explain how each could affect the research.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** Identify one reason why a researcher might choose structured interviews rather than unstructured interviews when asking teachers about the effectiveness of homework policies in a large sample of schools.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** Explain two ways pupil vulnerability can affect choices of research methods when studying classroom mental health support in secondary schools.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** Describe one advantage of using a stratified random sample of schools when researching differences in teacher morale between urban and rural secondary schools in England.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** State one theoretical reason a positivist researcher would prefer using official exam result statistics rather than participant observation to study academic attainment in secondary schools.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

- 11** Identify one way an unstructured interview with a headteacher could increase validity when researching school leadership styles.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Compare two strengths of using video-recorded lessons and non-participant observation when analysing teacher pupil interaction in a classroom setting.

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

- 13** Explain two limitations of using official Department for Education statistics to measure the success of a behaviour policy introduced in a multi academy trust.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

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

(Total for Question 14 is 4 marks)

- 15** 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 15 is 4 marks)

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- 16** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that participant observation is the best method for researching pupil teacher relationships in secondary school classrooms, using education examples where appropriate.

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 16 is 12 marks)

# Mark scheme · GSOC.AL8 Researching Education: Methods in Context

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## Question 1

- **B1** B (researcher watches lessons without taking part)
- **Answer: B**

## Question 2

- **B1** identifies participant observation as the researcher joining the group being studied, taking part in activities
- **B1** development, e.g. in a school this could mean the researcher acting as a teaching assistant or joining lessons while observing
- **Answer: Participant observation is when the researcher joins and takes part in the group being studied; in a school this could include acting as a teaching assistant or joining classroom activities while observing.**

## Question 3

- **B1** identifies one practical problem, e.g. literacy or comprehension limits of younger pupils
- **B1** explains why this is a problem, e.g. pupils may misunderstand questions leading to unreliable answers
- **B1** identifies a second element or development, e.g. time available in lessons or need for teacher supervision
- **B1** explains the second point, e.g. limited lesson time can reduce response rates or encourage rushed answers
- **Answer: One practical problem is that Year 8 pupils may have limited literacy or misunderstand questions, which can produce unreliable answers. Another issue is limited lesson time and the need for teacher supervision, leading to low response rates or rushed completion.**

## Question 4

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

## Question 5

- **B1** identifies a strength, e.g. documents provide existing quantitative data that can show patterns over time
- **B1** identifies a limitation, e.g. official records may be incomplete or biased by school recording practices
- **B1** brief development of either strength or limitation
- **Answer: A strength is that official documents give existing quantitative data showing patterns over time, such as trends in attendance or exclusions. A limitation is that records may be incomplete or influenced by the school's recording practices, so they may not accurately reflect all incidents.**

## Question 6

- **B1** identifies a practical constraint, e.g. requirement for parental consent forms
- **B1** explains effect, e.g. low return rates could reduce sample size or make the observed group unrepresentative
- **B1** identifies a second practical constraint, e.g. restriction on interviewing pupils during lesson time
- **B1** explains effect, e.g. inability to interview during lessons limits opportunities for immediate pupil perspectives and may reduce the depth of insight into observed interactions
- **Answer: One constraint is the requirement for parental consent forms; low return rates could reduce the number of pupils who can be recorded and make the observed sample unrepresentative. A second constraint is the school rule forbidding interviews during lessons; this prevents immediate follow up with pupils about events on the recording and limits the depth of pupil perspective available to the researcher.**

### Question 7

- **B1** identifies a reason, e.g. structured interviews allow standardised questions and easier comparison across a large sample
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this improves reliability and simplifies quantitative analysis
- **Answer: Structured interviews allow standardised questions and easier comparison across many teachers, improving reliability and simplifying quantitative analysis.**

### Question 8

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. need for extra safeguarding may rule out some intrusive methods
- **B1** explains why, e.g. vulnerable pupils may need support, so methods that could distress them like in depth interviews or covert observation may be inappropriate
- **B1** identifies a second way, e.g. consent processes may be more complex
- **B1** explains why, e.g. parental consent, assent from pupils and liaison with school counsellors take time and can limit the number of participants
- **Answer: Vulnerability means extra safeguarding may rule out intrusive methods, since in depth interviews or covert observation could distress pupils. Also, consent processes are more complex, requiring parental consent and pupil assent plus liaison with counsellors, which takes time and limits participant numbers.**

### Question 9

- **B1** identifies an advantage, e.g. ensures both urban and rural schools are represented proportionally
- **B1** development, e.g. improves representativeness and allows valid comparisons between types
- **B1** further development, e.g. reduces sampling bias by ensuring smaller subgroups are included
- **B1** brief example or link to the educational context
- **Answer: Stratified random sampling ensures urban and rural schools are represented proportionally, improving representativeness and allowing valid comparisons between school types. It also reduces sampling bias by including smaller subgroups that might be missed by simple random sampling.**

### Question 10

- **B1** identifies a positivist reason, e.g. positivists favour quantitative, measurable data that can be analysed for patterns and general laws
- **B1** brief development, e.g. official statistics provide reliable, comparable numerical measures across schools
- **Answer: A positivist would prefer official exam statistics because they provide quantitative, measurable data for analysing patterns and making general comparisons across schools, seen as more reliable and objective than observation.**

### Question 11

- **B1** identifies a way, e.g. allows in depth, detailed responses and follow up questions
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this can reveal meanings and motives that standardised methods miss, increasing validity
- **Answer: An unstructured interview allows in depth responses and follow up questions, revealing meanings and motives that standardised methods might miss and so increasing validity.**

### Question 12

- **B1** identifies a strength of video recording, e.g. allows detailed replay and micro analysis
- **B1** identifies a strength of non-participant observation, e.g. researcher can observe without altering the interaction as much as participation might
- **B1** explains comparison, e.g. video supports detailed, repeatable analysis while non-participant observation supports real time, broader context awareness
- **B1** further development, e.g. video provides a permanent record improving reliability, non-participant observation may improve naturalism if the researcher is unobtrusive
- **Answer: Video recording allows detailed replay and micro analysis and provides a permanent record that improves reliability. Non-participant observation lets the researcher watch without joining in, which can keep interactions more natural. Video helps repeatable, detailed study while non-participant observation supports awareness of broader context and naturalism.**

### Question 13

- **B1** identifies one limitation, e.g. official statistics may not capture informal improvements in classroom atmosphere
- **B1** explains why, e.g. numbers such as fixed term exclusions are crude and miss nuanced changes
- **B1** identifies a second limitation, e.g. changes in recording practices or incentives can affect statistics
- **B1** explains why, e.g. schools might record incidents differently over time, making comparisons unreliable
- **Answer: Official statistics may miss informal improvements in classroom atmosphere because measures like exclusions are crude and do not capture nuanced change. Also, changes in recording practices or incentives can alter figures independently of real behaviour change, so trends may be unreliable.**

### Question 14

- **B1** 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
- **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 15

- **B1** 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
- **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 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Simple statements about participant observation and one other method with little or no application to classroom examples, and no sustained evaluation.
- **Level 2** (4-6): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-9): 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.
- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **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.