2.11 Reliability, Validity and Representativeness in Sociological Research: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for questions worth 3 marks or more. Spend about 30 minutes on the whole pack.

1 Explain one reason why unstructured interviews may score poorly on reliability when used in several different schools.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Explain one reason why unstructured interviews, used to research young people's reasons for truancy, tend to score highly on validity.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Item B: A researcher sends a structured questionnaire to 500 pupils across ten schools chosen by the researcher's contacts, and receives 320 responses. The researcher reports the findings as if they represent all pupils in the city.

(a) Using Item B, identify two features of the sample or method that might make the sample unrepresentative of all pupils in the city. **(2)**

(b) Using Item B, explain one way the researcher could improve representativeness when sampling pupils in the city. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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4 Explain one strength of using a large, random sample in survey research when the main concern is representativeness.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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5 Explain two differences between reliability and validity when evaluating sociological research methods.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Discuss whether reliability or validity matters more to sociologists when evaluating research methods. Use examples and reach a reasoned conclusion.

(Total for Question 6 is 8 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.11 Reliability, Validity and Representativeness in Sociological Research: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies a reason, e.g. interviews are not standardised so different interviewers may ask different questions or probe different issues **B1**

brief development, e.g. this variation makes it unlikely the same results would be produced if the study was repeated **B1**

Answer: Unstructured interviews are not standardised, so different interviewers may ask different questions or probe different issues; this variation means repeating the study is unlikely to produce the same results, lowering reliability.

Question 2

identifies a reason, e.g. unstructured interviews allow respondents to speak at length and explain meanings, motives and context **B1**

development, e.g. the researcher can probe and follow up, producing rich, detailed qualitative data **B1**

further development, e.g. this in-depth material gives a more accurate, true picture of why people behave as they do, increasing validity **B1**

clear linking to validity rather than reliability or representativeness **B1**

Answer: Unstructured interviews let respondents talk at length and let the researcher probe for meanings and motives; the resulting rich, detailed qualitative data gives a truer, more in-depth picture of behaviour and therefore higher validity.

Question 3

(a) a correct feature, e.g. schools were chosen by the researcher's contacts (convenience sampling) rather than randomly **B1**

(a) a second correct feature, e.g. only 320 of 500 questionnaires were returned, so non-response could bias the sample **B1**

(a) Answer: The schools were chosen by the researcher's contacts rather than randomly (convenience sampling), and only 320 of 500 questionnaires were returned, so non-response bias may make the sample unrepresentative.

(b) identifies an improvement, e.g. use random sampling or stratified sampling across all city schools **B1**

(b) development, e.g. this would ensure the sample more closely matches the wider pupil population and reduce selection bias **B1**

(b) Answer: The researcher could use random or stratified sampling across all city schools, ensuring the sample better matches the wider pupil population and reducing selection bias.

Question 4

identifies a strength, e.g. random sampling reduces selection bias and increases the chance the sample mirrors the population **B1**

development, e.g. larger samples also reduce the impact of random variation, making estimates more stable **B1**

further development, e.g. this allows safer generalisation from sample to population and supports external validity of quantitative results **B1**

clear linking to representativeness and generalisation **B1**

Answer: Random sampling reduces selection bias and a large sample reduces random variation, so together they increase the chance the sample mirrors the population and allow safer generalisation from sample to population, improving representativeness.

Question 5

identifies first difference, e.g. reliability is about consistency and repeatability **B1**

develops first difference, e.g. a reliable method produces similar results if repeated **B1**

identifies second difference, e.g. validity is about accuracy and whether the method measures what it claims **B1**

develops second difference, e.g. a method can be reliable but not valid if it consistently measures the wrong thing **B1**

Answer: Reliability concerns consistency and repeatability, meaning a reliable method produces similar results if repeated; validity concerns accuracy and whether the method measures what it claims, so a method can be reliable but not valid if it consistently measures the wrong thing.

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Question 6

Level 1 Basic statements about reliability and validity with limited development, or a one-sided answer with little or no example and no clear conclusion. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear explanation of reliability and validity, with developed arguments for why each might be important, some use of examples, and a simple supported judgement or partial conclusion. **4-6**

Level 3 Well-developed, balanced discussion of both reliability and validity, uses appropriate examples (for example questionnaires versus unstructured interviews), shows understanding of trade-offs and practical issues, and reaches a clear, justified conclusion about which matters more in typical sociological research. **7-8**

Indicative content:

- Define reliability: consistency and repeatability of results; illustrate with structured questionnaires and standardised interviews.
- Define validity: truthfulness and depth of understanding; illustrate with unstructured interviews and participant observation.
- Arguments for reliability mattering more: enables comparisons across time/groups, supports quantitative generalisation, easier to test and check, important for policy-related research needing stable measures.
- Arguments for validity mattering more: sociology studies meanings and motives, so understanding social reality may require valid, in-depth methods even if less repeatable; qualitative insight can explain why patterns exist.
- Trade-offs and practicalities: reliable methods may sacrifice depth, valid methods may be time-consuming and unrepresentative; mixed-methods approaches can combine strengths.
- Examples: school attitude surveys (reliability useful for tracking change) versus life-history interviews (validity essential to understand complex life choices).
- Reasoned conclusion: balanced answers might argue validity is crucial for core sociological understanding, but reliability is essential for measurement and comparison; the best answer judges which matters more depending on the research aim and may recommend a compromise or mixed methods.

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