2.12 Practical and Theoretical Factors Influencing Choice of Research Method: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use clear sentences for questions worth 4 marks or more. Where asked, apply the named factor to the scenario given. Total time suggested: about 30 minutes.

1 Identify one practical advantage of using a team of trained interviewers to collect structured questionnaire data across several neighbourhoods when researching household poverty.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Explain two ways that a positivist and an interpretivist might differ when choosing how important representativeness is for a study of national patterns in youth political participation.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Discuss which factors should matter most when choosing a method to study the impact of a sudden factory closure on workers' daily lives in one town.

(Total for Question 3 is 8 marks)

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4 Define what sociologists mean by 'researcher access' in the context of choosing a method to study a closed social group, such as a religious sect.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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5 Identify and explain two practical problems a lone researcher might face when using participant observation to study a small, secretive drug-using peer group in one city.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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6 Item A: A small research team has six months and a modest budget to study why a coastal town has rising youth unemployment. The team can access local schools and the job centre but not informal groups meeting outside institutions.

Using Item A and your own knowledge, explain one practical reason why the team might choose to use structured questionnaires with school pupils rather than covert observation of street networks.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.12 Practical and Theoretical Factors Influencing Choice of Research Method: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies an advantage, e.g. greater coverage and faster data collection	**B1**
brief development, e.g. multiple interviewers can reach more households in the same time, improving sample size and representativeness	**B1**

Answer: Using a team of interviewers gives greater coverage and faster data collection because multiple interviewers can reach more households in the same time, improving sample size and representativeness.

Question 2

identifies positivist view, e.g. positivists prioritise representativeness	**B1**
explains positivist reason, e.g. representative samples allow measurement and generalisation about national patterns	**B1**
identifies interpretivist view, e.g. interpretivists may place less importance on representativeness	**B1**
explains interpretivist reason, e.g. they prefer depth and understanding of meanings which often come from small, purposive samples rather than large representative samples	**B1**

Answer: Positivists prioritise representativeness because representative samples allow measurement and generalisation about national patterns; interpretivists place less importance on representativeness and prefer depth and understanding of meanings from small, purposive samples.

Question 3

Level 1 Basic points showing limited understanding. May list a few practical or theoretical factors with little explanation or application to the factory-closure context.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear explanation of several relevant practical and theoretical factors with some application to the case. Shows understanding of trade offs, for example time and access versus the need for validity or representativeness.	**4-6**
Level 3 Detailed discussion weighing practical and theoretical factors, with clear, applied reasoning. Considers examples such as access to workers, funding, team size, and whether interpretivist depth or positivist generalisability is more appropriate. Reaches a supported conclusion that balances realism and research aims.	**7-8**

Indicative content:

- Practical factors to consider: time available after closure to collect data before memories fade or circumstances change, funding for travel and interview transcription, size and skills of the research team, and access to workplace, ex-employees and relevant gatekeepers.
- Theoretical factors to consider: positivist goals of measuring changes across many workers for generalisable patterns, versus interpretivist goals of understanding individual meanings and experiences in depth, and how these shape method choice.
- Application to the town factory closure: interpretivist methods such as life history or in depth interviews and participant observation could provide high validity about daily lived experience and emotional impact, especially where access is available and the sample is small.
- Counterpoint: if the aim is to estimate the scale of economic impact across many households, a quantitative survey with a larger sample would be more representative and suited to positivist aims.
- Trade offs: limited funding and a small team may favour in depth qualitative work; a large funded project might combine methods, using a survey for breadth and interviews for depth.
- Conclusion guidance: for this study of daily lives in one town, prioritising theoretical validity and depth is often appropriate, given the local, contextual nature of the impact, but practical limits such as access and time must shape an achievable method, and a mixed approach may be ideal if resources allow.

Question 4

identifies researcher access as the ability of the researcher to reach and gain the cooperation of participants (oe)	**B1**
development, e.g. this includes practical permission, trust, gatekeepers and the time needed to gain entry	**B1**

Answer: Researcher access is the ability of the researcher to reach and gain the cooperation of participants; it includes practical permission, trust, gatekeepers and the time needed to gain entry.

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Question 5

identifies a practical problem, e.g. safety concerns when entering a risky setting	**B1**
explains this problem, e.g. lone researcher may be at physical risk and cannot ask for backup while observing	**B1**
identifies a second practical problem, e.g. limits on time and ability to record detailed data while building rapport	**B1**
explains the second problem, e.g. as a single observer the researcher may miss events or find it hard to take notes discreetly without damaging trust	**B1**

Answer: A lone researcher may face safety concerns when entering a risky setting, being at physical risk and lacking backup, and may be limited in time and ability to record detailed data while building rapport, because taking notes can damage trust and the observer may miss events.

Question 6

identifies a practical reason from the item, e.g. access to schools makes questionnaires feasible	**B1**
develops the point, e.g. formal access is easier to arrange and less risky than trying to gain covert access to informal street networks	**B1**
adds a methodological consequence, e.g. questionnaires can collect data from many pupils quickly within time and budget limits	**B1**
further development, e.g. covert observation risks legal and safety problems and is time consuming to gain meaningful data, so is impractical given six months and a modest budget	**B1**

Answer: Because the team can access schools, structured questionnaires are feasible and easier to arrange than covert access to informal street networks. Questionnaires allow many pupils to be surveyed quickly within time and budget limits, whereas covert observation is risky, may raise legal and safety issues, and is time consuming to produce reliable data within six months.

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