2.4 Interviews: Structured, Unstructured and Group: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary and name sociologists where you can.

1 Using your knowledge of structured and unstructured interviews, explain what is happening in this scenario.

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

2 Evaluate the view that unstructured interviews produce more valid data than structured interviews. In your answer you should refer to sociologists' views and consider more than one point of view.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Calculate the mean number of distinct themes mentioned per unstructured interview, and use this to comment on the richness of data produced by the unstructured interviews compared with the structured interviews.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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4 State one reason the researcher in Q16 should be cautious about directly comparing the 'number of themes' figures between the two interview types.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.4 Interviews: Structured, Unstructured and Group: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies the first stage as a structured interview (fixed questions, same order for every pupil)	**B1**
identifies its result: short, guarded answers, suggesting lower validity on this sensitive topic	**B1**
identifies the second stage as an unstructured interview (informal, conversational, with follow-up questions)	**B1**
identifies its result: longer, more detailed accounts, including unexpected new information	**B1**
explains why: the flexible, rapport-building nature of unstructured interviews can generate richer, more valid data on a sensitive topic like bullying	**B1**
accurate use of terminology throughout (structured/unstructured interview, validity, rapport)	**B1**

Answer: The first stage is a structured interview, which produces short, guarded answers, suggesting lower validity on this sensitive topic. The second stage is an unstructured interview, which produces longer, more detailed accounts, including unexpected new information, because its flexible, rapport-building nature generates richer, more valid data on a sensitive topic like bullying.

Question 2

Level 4 A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains BOTH the case for unstructured interviews' validity AND the case for structured interviews' reliability, supported by accurate reference to Ann Oakley's work. Strengths and weaknesses of each are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout.	**10-12**
Level 3 A clear evaluation that explains both the unstructured-interview case and the structured-interview case, with some accurate detail. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.	**7-9**
Level 2 Some relevant explanation of interview types, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison of views.	**4-6**
Level 1 One or two isolated, undeveloped points about interviews, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.	**1-3**
Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- Case for unstructured interviews: their flexibility allows follow-up questions and probing, generating richer, more valid data, especially on sensitive topics.
- Case continued: Ann Oakley argued a more reciprocal, rapport-building style, as opposed to the detached traditional model, produces more honest, meaningful answers, particularly researching women's experiences.
- Case for structured interviews: standardised questions asked in the same way and order make results reliable, comparable and repeatable, favoured by the positivist tradition.
- Case continued: structured interviews are quicker to administer and analyse across a large sample, and reduce interviewer bias compared with a more free-flowing conversation.
- Evaluation of unstructured interviews: critics argue the closer, less standardised approach reduces objectivity and makes it harder to compare answers across interviews, reducing reliability.
- Evaluation of structured interviews: critics argue fixed questions cannot capture unexpected information or the true depth of an interviewee's meaning, reducing validity, particularly on sensitive topics.
- A balanced conclusion should weigh unstructured interviews' strength in validity and depth against structured interviews' strength in reliability and scale, noting the choice often depends on the sensitivity of the topic and the researcher's theoretical approach.

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Question 3

sums the 20 values correctly: total = 69	**B1**
calculates the mean = 69 / 20 = 3.45 (awrt 3.5) themes per interview	**B1**
compares this to the structured interviews' fixed 3 themes, identifying the unstructured interviews generated on average more distinct themes (3.45 vs 3)	**B1**
links this to validity: unstructured interviews, by letting respondents raise topics not asked about directly, can produce richer, more valid data	**B1**

Answer: Total = 69, mean = 69 / 20 = 3.45 themes per unstructured interview, slightly more than the fixed 3 themes covered in each structured interview. This suggests the unstructured format let respondents raise additional issues, producing richer, more valid data.

Question 4

identifies a genuine reason, e.g. the unstructured interviews were likely much longer, giving more time and opportunity for extra themes to come up	**B1**
brief development, e.g. so the difference may partly reflect interview length rather than the structured/unstructured format alone	**B1**

Answer: The unstructured interviews were likely much longer than the structured ones, giving more time and opportunity for extra themes to come up, so the difference may partly reflect interview length rather than the structured/unstructured format alone.

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