



GSOC.RM9 Case Studies and Longitudinal Studies as Research Methods

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 50 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. For questions worth 4 marks or more write your answers in full sentences. Spend about 50 minutes on this paper.

- 1** Which of the following best describes a case study in sociological research of an institution such as a single school?

- ☐ A) a large scale survey of many schools at one point in time
- ☐ B) an in-depth study of one group, institution or event producing rich detailed data
- ☐ C) the use of official statistics to compare schools across regions
- ☐ D) an experiment comparing two groups randomly assigned to conditions

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by a 'longitudinal study' when investigating a cohort of people over time.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Outline one strength of using a case study to research the culture of a single company.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Outline one weakness of case studies when trying to make general claims about social behaviour across a city.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5** Identify one practical advantage of longitudinal studies compared with cross-sectional surveys when studying life-course changes.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

- 6** Explain two weaknesses of longitudinal studies as a method when sociologists follow the same cohort for many years.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** Outline one ethical issue that can arise in a long-term longitudinal study working with the same family over thirty years.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** Outline one strength of case studies for producing valid data about a single group's lived experience, such as a community centre users group.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Item A: The 'Young Lives' style hypothetical project. A research team plans to follow 800 children born in the same year in one UK city. They will interview the same children every five years from age 5 to age 35 about education, employment and health. Many interviewers will visit participants in their homes and schools during the study.
- (a) Using Item A and your knowledge of longitudinal studies, identify two practical problems the research team might face when following the same 800 people over 30 years. (4)

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Explain two ways a detailed case study of a single youth club could produce findings that are not reliable for other clubs in the same region.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** Identify one reason a sociologist might choose a case study over a longitudinal study when researching a single failing school.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Define what is meant by 'sample attrition' in the context of a longitudinal research project following the same participants over decades.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

- 13** Explain two strengths of longitudinal studies for understanding change in education and employment over the life course, using sociological reasoning.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** Using your knowledge of research methods, explain one way researchers can try to reduce the problem of sample attrition in a long-term longitudinal study.

(Total for Question 14 is 4 marks)

- 15** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that longitudinal studies are worth the high cost and effort involved in following the same people for many years.

Discuss how far sociologists would agree that longitudinal studies are worth the high cost and effort involved in following the same people for many years.

(Total for Question 15 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.RM9 Case Studies and Longitudinal Studies as Research Methods

Question 1

- **B1** B (an in-depth study of one group, institution or event producing rich detailed data)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies that a longitudinal study follows the same group of respondents and re-studies them at intervals over an extended period (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. allows researchers to track change over time in the same people
- **Answer: A longitudinal study follows the same group of respondents and re-studies them at intervals over an extended period, allowing researchers to track change over time in the same people.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies a strength, e.g. produces rich, detailed qualitative data about the company's culture
- **B1** development, e.g. allows deep understanding of processes, meanings and relationships within that organisation
- **Answer: A case study produces rich, detailed qualitative data about the company's culture, allowing a deep understanding of processes, meanings and relationships within that organisation.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies a weakness, e.g. findings are hard to generalise from a single case to a wider population
- **B1** development, e.g. the single case may be unique in ways that prevent wider application of conclusions
- **Answer: Findings from a case study are hard to generalise to a wider population because the single case may be unique in ways that prevent applying conclusions across the city.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies an advantage, e.g. they allow direct observation of change in the same individuals rather than inferring change from different age groups
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this makes it easier to link cause and effect over time for the same people
- **Answer: Longitudinal studies allow direct observation of change in the same individuals rather than inferring change from different age groups, making it easier to link cause and effect over time.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies a weakness, e.g. high cost and time required to run long term studies
- **B1** development, e.g. funding and researcher continuity can be difficult to maintain over many years
- **B1** identifies a second weakness, e.g. sample attrition where participants drop out over time
- **B1** development, e.g. attrition can bias the results if those who remain are systematically different from those who left
- **Answer: Longitudinal studies are costly and time consuming to run, making funding and consistent research teams hard to maintain, and they risk sample attrition, where participants drop out over time, which can bias results if those who remain differ systematically from those who left.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies an ethical issue, e.g. maintaining informed consent as participants age and family circumstances change
- **B1** development, e.g. researchers must regularly reconfirm consent and deal with changing capacity or changing relationships
- **Answer: An ethical issue is maintaining informed consent over time as participants age and family circumstances change; researchers must regularly reconfirm consent and consider changing capacity and relationships.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a strength, e.g. high validity because researchers can use participant observation and in-depth interviews
- **B1** development, e.g. close contact and multiple qualitative methods increase understanding of meanings and contexts
- **Answer: Case studies have high validity because researchers can use participant observation and in-depth interviews, with close contact and multiple qualitative methods increasing understanding of meanings and contexts.**

Question 9

- (a) **B1** identifies a practical problem, e.g. high cost of interviewing large numbers repeatedly over many years
- (a) **B1** identifies a second practical problem, e.g. sample attrition, participants moving away or refusing further participation
- (a) **B1** development for first problem, e.g. funding may be hard to secure for the whole period and quality may drop if budgets shrink
- (a) **B1** development for second problem, e.g. loss of participants can reduce representativeness and require replacement strategies
- **(a) Answer: Practical problems include the high cost of interviewing large numbers repeatedly, making long term funding and consistent quality difficult, and sample attrition, as participants may move away or withdraw, reducing representativeness and forcing replacement strategies.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies a reason, e.g. the club may have a unique set of staff or a particular funding situation
- **B1** development, e.g. staff style or funding can shape activities and behaviour so results do not transfer to clubs with different conditions
- **B1** identifies a second reason, e.g. the small sample and specific local culture may produce context dependent findings
- **B1** development, e.g. local demographics or community history can affect outcomes, reducing reliability if repeated elsewhere
- **Answer: Findings may not be reliable because the club could have a unique staff team or funding situation affecting activities and behaviour, and because the small, context specific sample and local culture mean results depend on local demographics and history and may not repeat elsewhere.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a reason, e.g. case study gives immediate, in-depth understanding without waiting many years
- **B1** development, e.g. policy makers may need rapid findings to inform interventions, so a case study is quicker and cheaper
- **Answer: A sociologist might choose a case study because it provides immediate, in-depth understanding without the delay of following a cohort for many years, which is useful when policy makers need rapid findings.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies sample attrition as the loss of participants from the sample over time
- **B1** development, e.g. due to moving away, refusing further participation or dying, which can bias results
- **Answer: Sample attrition is the loss of participants from the sample over time, for example because people move away, refuse further participation or die, which can bias the study results.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a strength, e.g. ability to establish sequences of events and potential causal links
- **B1** development, e.g. observing the same people over time helps show whether earlier experiences are followed by later outcomes
- **B1** identifies a second strength, e.g. can reveal long term patterns and life course trajectories that cross-sectional studies miss
- **B1** development, e.g. this helps sociologists understand how early disadvantages link to later unemployment or health issues
- **Answer: Longitudinal studies can establish sequences of events and potential causal links because observing the same people over time shows whether earlier experiences are followed by later outcomes, and they can reveal long term patterns and life course trajectories, helping sociologists see how early disadvantages relate to later unemployment or health issues.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a method to reduce attrition, e.g. maintaining regular contact and updated addresses with participants
- **B1** development, e.g. this keeps participants engaged and makes follow up easier
- **B1** identifies a second measure, e.g. offering incentives or compensations for continued participation
- **B1** development, e.g. incentives can improve retention but must be balanced against ethical concerns about undue inducement
- **Answer: Researchers can reduce attrition by maintaining regular contact and updated addresses to keep participants**

Question 15

- **Level 1** (1-3): Simple or partial arguments. Limited use of sociological ideas. Little or no balance. Conclusion, if present, is unsupported or is a brief assertion.
- **Level 2** (4-7): Developed arguments using sociological perspectives or studies. Some balance, with at least one strength and one weakness considered. Some evidence of evaluation but with limited depth or support for the judgement.
- **Level 3** (8-12): Well developed, balanced discussion drawing on sociological perspectives and examples. Clear evaluation of strengths such as ability to track change and suggest causal links, and weaknesses such as cost, attrition and ethical issues. A supported conclusion that reaches a justified judgement on whether the benefits outweigh the costs.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Arguments that longitudinal studies are worth the cost: they can track the same individuals and so identify sequences and potential causal relationships, for example linking early education experiences to later employment outcomes, which cross-sectional studies cannot do as effectively
 - They reveal life course patterns and long term social change, providing rich data for policy evaluation and theory development, and can combine quantitative and qualitative methods for depth and representativeness
 - Arguments that they may not be worth the cost: longitudinal studies are expensive and time consuming, require long term funding and researcher continuity, and face sample attrition which may bias results
 - Ethical challenges arise from long contact with participants, such as maintaining consent and privacy across decades, and attrition reduction methods like incentives raise ethical trade offs
 - Different sociological perspectives may value longitudinal research differently: interactionists may prize qualitative longitudinal insight into identity formation, functionalists or policy-oriented sociologists may value longitudinal evidence for social policy, while some practical or critical perspectives may prefer faster, cheaper methods where time or resources are limited
 - Conclusion could weigh the high value of unique longitudinal insights against practical and ethical limits, concluding that longitudinal studies are often worth the cost for questions about change over time, but not always appropriate for all research questions