Research Methods Knowledge Organiser

**2. Key Word**

**Definitions**

Validity

Data is valid if it is

truthful and measure

what it claims to

measure.

**1. Approaches to Description**

**research**

Positivism

Involves collecting information about so-

cial facts which are aspects of behaviour

that can be counted and measured. It

looks to establish causal and non-causal

relationships.

Reliability

Data is reliable if it

would produce the

similar results in

repeated in similar

circumstances

Interpretivism

Realism

This approach to research puts

emphasis on the importance of find what

things and behaviour mean to those

involved. They are not concerned with

causal relationships.

Representativeness

This can describe a

sample or data it

refers to the state in

which the sample/

data shares the same

characteristics as the

population under

study.

Argue that both Interpretivism & positiv-

ism and their preferred research meth-

ods have strengths /weaknesses. So it

makes sense to select the method most

suitable for the study.

Triangulation/

Methodological

Pluralism

This involves use more than 2 methods

to study an issue e.g. an observation

study combined with a questionnaire.

Generalisability

Objectivity

This refers to when

findings are

applicable to the

wider society

This refers to an unbi-

ased on neutral view.

Some people believe

it is impossible to be

completely objective

as your values and

beliefs inevitably

**3. Key Word**

**Definitions**

Qualitative Data

Data that is in words, de-

scribing social situations

and their meanings.

Quantitative Data

Reflexive

Numerical or statistical

data.

influence your study.

The belief that social be-

haviour is not an automatic

response to events or the

behaviour of others. Before

acting we decide what is

meant and consider how

others will view what we do.

Subjectivity

This refers to when

views are based on or

influenced by

personal feelings,

tastes, or opinions:

Contrasted with

objective.

Primary Data

Data collected by the re-

searchers themselves.

Ethical guidelines

This a set of ethical

and moral principles

that researchers

Secondary Sources

Information that has been

collected by others and is

then used in a new piece of

research.

should abide by so

that the participants

are protected from all

forms of harm.

Research Methods Knowledge Organiser

**4. Research Method**

**Questionnaires**

**Description**

**Strengths**

**Weaknesses**

Consists of a list of questions 

either on paper or online.

Quick and cheap way

of collecting data.





Respondents might not

understand the

questions.

They can be distributed via



Answers to closed

questions can be

analysed quickly.

post or in person. The person

Doesn’t allow

completing the questionnaire

(the respondent) reads and

respondents to explain

their answers.

answers the questions on

their own there is no need for

the researcher to be present.

Often used to collect large

amounts of data and identify

trends & patterns.





A large sample can be

studied in a short time.





Postal questionnaires

have a low response rate

They are standardised

and therefore reliable.

Questions can be

interpreted differently and

participants may not tell

the truth.

**Interviews**

***Structured Interview :***

Basically a questionnaire with

questions read out and the

answers recorded by the

interviewer.



The interviewer can

explain anything the

respondent is unsure

about.





It is more time

consuming than a ques-

tionnaire

Respondents may give

more socially accepted

answers and be influ-





The standard approach

makes it reliable

enced by interviewer bias.

Presence of a re-

searcher improves re-

sponse rates.

***Unstructured Interview :***

Are more like a conversation

with the questions and





Allows interviewer to

explore issues in great

detail.



Are time consuming and

conducted on smaller

samples.

answers not following any

fixed, pre-determined path.

The natural setting can 

The interviewer has to be

highly skilled.

allow for openness and

honesty making the



Analysing the information

collected is more compli-

cation and subjective.

data more valid.

***Semi-structured:***





Can avoid the



The interviews are not

standardised so are less

reliable.

Usually consist of a series of

open ended questions linked

to the issues the

disadvantages

associated with other

interview methods.





Can be expensive and

time consuming

researcher wants to cover.

Open ended questions

gives opportunities for

the interviewer and re-

spondent to discuss

topics.

Interviewer bias may be a

problem.



Research is not

confined to what the

researcher believed to

be important.

Research Methods Knowledge Organiser

**Covert**

**Overt**

**Not Openly Acknowledged or**

**displayed. Observers remained**

**hidden or undetected.**

**Done or shown openly; plainly**

**apparent. Observers presence is**

**known.**

**5. Research**

**Method**

**Description**

**Strengths**

**Weaknesses**

**Covert Participant**

**Observation**

Sociologists become a

members of the group they

are observing. This is an





Covert participant

observations allows

hard to reach groups to

be researched.





Researchers may have to

rely on memory of events

and who said what.

example of ethnography, the

detailed collection of a groups

usual behaviour The group

members will be unaware of

the researchers intentions or 

true identity.

With hard to reach groups

gaining access may be

challenging in the first

place.

Detailed qualitative da-

ta can be obtained.

If the group behaves

normally the data is

valid.





Gaining trust of a group

can be a lengthy process

so the researcher has to

ensure not to attract too

much attention.



The data records what

actually happens.

Raises ethical issues of

consent and deception and

the researcher may risk

their safety if the group

concerned is

involved in illegal

behaviour.

**Overt Participant** Involves the researcher being 

Issues of deception and 

consent are resolved in

Overt participant

The Hawthorn effect is

more likely to occur if the

group is aware of the

presence and purpose of

the researcher.

open with the group they are

**Observation**

going to study, before joining

a group the researcher is

observations.

likely to inform the group's



Researcher can ask

members (either personally or

questions openly in

overt participant

observations



through the agency of a spon-

sor) about such things as the

purpose of the research and

how long the research will

last.

**Non Participant**

**Observation**

Involves a researcher being 

with a group but not being a

Easy to make note of

what is happening.





The usefulness of the re-

search may be affected

due to the Hawthorne

Effect..

part of it. This enables the



The issues of deception

and gaining consent

are resolved.

researcher to observed and

count instances of the behav-

By not being fully

iour they are interested in.

submerged into a group

may undermine the aim of

the research.



Allows for the collection

of both qualitative and

quantitative data.

Research Methods Knowledge Organiser

**7. Key Word**

**Definitions**

**6. Secondary Sources Description**

Closed Questions This questions limit the

respondent’s

answers, usually

Existing sociological

Research

This requires a literature review so

that existing research into a topic

can be summarised and allows are-

requiring them to select

an answer.

as or gaps in knowledge to be iden- Open-ended

These allow the

tified. This helps to establish con-

text for new research and comment

on what is already known.

questions

respondent to answer in

their own words; usually

used to collect

Official statistics

Are the most used secondary

source in research as they are

qualitative data.

Longitudinal

If the same sample is

studied a number of

times, over period of

time.

readily available and easy to

Studies

access. It also allows for the

identification of trends and

patterns, giving sociologists the op-

portunity to make international

comparisons.

Pilot Study

A small scale test or

practice before the main

study. This can help to

reveal any problems

with the method allowing

them to be corrected

before the main study.

Mass Media

The use of media materials be pro-

duce primary data via a content

analysis. The content of media

material can be give insight to pub-

lic opinion

Personal Documents.

This refers to items such as diaries

and letters; it allows sociologists to

gain insights to everyday life and

allows rich detailed data showing

how society changed.

Interviewer Bias

Hawthorn Effect

This is where the

interviewer can influence

the answers given by

the respondents.

People behave

differently when they

know they are being

studied. This can impact

the validity of research.

**8. Key Term**

**Definition**

Ethnography

Involves the direct observation of

a group and often involves

Access

Before any information

is collected the

participants to investigate the

way the group experiences and

interprets the social world.

researcher needs to

access those under

study so make contact

with group and gain per-

mission if necessary

Replicate

Another term for ‘repeat’

Official Statistics

Data collected by governments

and other official bodies e.g. The

Census, British Crime Survey.

Gate-keeper

This is someone with the

trust and respect of the

group who can ease the

introduction of the

Literature Review

Before starting own research

consideration is taken research

already carried out on the topic.

researcher.

Research Methods Knowledge Organiser

**9. Type of Sampling**

**Description**

**10. Key Term**

**Definition**

**Representative Samples**

Representative

sample

Share the same

characteristics as the

population under study.

Random Sample

This method allows each member of

the target population to have the ex-

actly same chance of being picked.

Often noted as the ‘names out of a

hat’ method.

Non-

representative

sample

Refers to it sample that

doesn't share the same

characteristics as the tar-

get population.

Stratified Sample

Quota Sample

The population is divided up and then

each section is sampled. This reflects

the correct proportions of the

population.

Sample Frame This is a list of all the

people in the target

population.

The researcher calculates how many

people from each group in the target

population are required and the re-

searcher then approaches people

who match the characteristics.

Target

Population

Refers to the entire group

the researcher is

interested in.

**11. Ethical Guideline Description**

Consent

Participants should

Systematic Sampling

This involves having a systematic

approach to selecting participants for

example every 10th name on the list.

know the research is

taking place and that

they agree to take part.

When they are in-

**Non-Representative Samples**

formed they know the

aims of the research

and any potential risks.

Snowball Sampling

Usually used for hard to reach groups

or those who wish to avoid attention it

requires the gatekeeper introducing

the researcher to one person and

then another person and the sample

grows this way.

Deception

Anonymity

If subjects are unaware

or misled about its

aims then they have

been deceived; this

breaches the general

rule of consent.

Volunteer Sample

This is where people are invited to

volunteer for the research.

Sometimes referred to as self-

selecting research.

The names of people,

organisations and

places are not usually

provided. This should

encourage honest and

open participation.

Purposive Sampling

Opportunity Sampling

Researcher will look to find people

with characteristics that relevant to

the purpose of the study.

The sample is made up of those who

are readily available, willing to take

part and suitable for the aim of the

Confidentiality

Sensitivity

Refers to protecting the

information that is

collected during

research.

Careful handing of sen-

sitive topics in research

should be prioritised

and partipcants should

not be made to feel

uncomfortable.

**12. Practical Issues**

**Description**

Finance & Funding

Availability of funding and the how much the costs

of research.

Time & Access

Consideration of the length and time of the re-

search is necessary as it has financial

Avoiding Harm

Those who agree to

take part in research

should not be harmed

physically or

implications for research. Need to consider how

you will research your target population.

Operationalising concepts.

Need to ensure the concepts of the research are

measurable and defined.

emotionally.