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AS Level Sociology

Sociological Research Methods

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Course outline

- Quantitative and qualitative methods of research; their strengths and limitations; research design.
- Sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, participant and non-participant observation, experiments, documents, and official statistics; the strengths and limitations of these sources.
- The distinction between primary and secondary data, and between quantitative and qualitative data.
- The relationship between positivism, Interpretivism and sociological methods; the nature of 'social facts'.
- The theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research.

Methodological Perspectives to Sociological Research Methods

- There are two methodological perspectives to Sociological research; Positivism Interpretivism.

	Positivism
Aim	'Scientific' quantitative methodology – statistics.
Key writer	Developed by Durkheim .
Main assumptions	<p>Society and social reality (what Durkheim calls 'social facts') have an objective nature as it exists independent and external to the individual.</p> <p>This is the idea that human behaviour is shaped by external stimuli (things that happen to us) rather than internal stimuli (what goes on in our mind).</p> <p>Social facts, according to Durkheim, can be expressed in statistics which can be analysed and understood in the same way scientist's study the natural world since they exists in casual relationships that can be empirically observed, tested and measured.</p> <p>Thus, we can only study objective facts that we can observe, NOT emotions, meanings and motives as they are subjective.</p>
How to research society and people	<p>For Durkheim there are two important steps to consider before beginning a research:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Disregard all preconceptions – abandon your personal ideas and be neutral. 2) 'Treat social facts as things' – only study external objective facts not internal subjective thoughts. <p>This way studies can be replicated by different investigators but should produce the same results.</p>
Type of research method they prefer to use	Field experiments (take place in natural settings) and questionnaires .
Limitations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Social facts are difficult to identify objectively as its meanings can differ among observers. E.g. crime has different meaning for criminals, police, courts, and criminologist. 2) Causal relationships between social facts and their effects on individuals are assumed by the researcher rather than directly observed. 3) Ignores inter-subjective meanings of acts since laws (social facts) don't always reflect people in society. E.g. Capital punishment is forbidden in the UK but a poll found high support for it.

Interpretivism	
Aim	Interpretive and qualitative methodology –words and detail.
Key writer	Developed by Weber .
Main assumptions	<p>Rejects positivism - They don't think human being can be studied using the same methods of natural science because such methods can only describe people's actions but sociologists don't just want descriptions they want reasons.</p> <p>Interpretivism argues people do not simply react to external stimuli BUT interpret the meaning of stimuli before reacting. Thus, we need to understand people's unobservable subjective states which cannot be measured by statistics.</p> <p>Weber argued social reality is more complex than Durkheim suggests because you can never obtain objectivity as facts are a product of subjective interpretation (e.g. the research we pick to study and how to investigate it is influenced by the researcher's experiences).</p> <p>Weber argues we need to study social action to understand why people behave in particular ways.</p> <p>Thus, data has to be interpreted by extracting meaning from observation since statistics can't speak for themselves.</p> <p>Symbolic Interactionism later added individuals maintain images of themselves that are shaped by the reaction of other.</p> <p>Labelling theory – social world is first classified (labelled by stereotypes or common sense) before it can be measured. They seek to understand this process of labelling and the affect it has on people.</p>
How to research society and people	Interpretivism advocates Value freedom which is the idea that researchers should not allow their personal beliefs and ideas (values) to affect data collection and analysis .
Type of research method they prefer to use	In-depth interviews and participant observations .
Limitations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Overemphasizes and assumes individuals consciously attach meaning to their actions which can put across a narrow view of what constitutes social action. 2) Value freedom is impossible and un-sociological since sociologists react to political, economic and social events. 3) Research process is all value ridden –e.g. the topic we pick to study, how we research it and analyse it.

- In practice most sociologists use **both** Positivist and Interpretivist's methods: most positivists use some interpretation in their research and most Interpretivists use some social facts in their research. Thus, **disputes** between the two traditions have become **less common** today.

Choosing a research method

Types of data

- There are two types of data which Sociologists commonly use:
 1. Primary and secondary data.
 2. Quantitative and qualitative data.

Primary vs. Secondary sources of data

- **Primary sources** – data collected by Sociologists themselves through research. Includes the use of various research methods including:
 - Experiments
 - Social surveys
 - Questionnaires
 - Interviews
 - Participant observation
- **Secondary sources** – data that is pre-existing/ collected by someone else. E.g. Official statistics or personal documents like photos, dairies, letters etc.

Quantitative and Qualitative data

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Objective	<p>To quantify data and generalise results from a sample to the population of interest.</p> <p>To measure the incidence of various views and opinions in a chosen sample.</p> <p>Sometimes followed by qualitative research which is used to explore some findings further.</p>	<p>Social reality has a specific meaning and relevance structure for people living, thinking and acting within it.</p> <p>Thus, any attempt to understand social reality must be grounded in people’s experience of that social reality.</p> <p>Seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied.</p> <p>To gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations.</p> <p>To provide insights into the setting of a problem, generating ideas and/or hypotheses for later quantitative research.</p> <p>To uncover prevalent trends in thought and opinion.</p>
Sample	Usually a large number of cases representing the population of interest. Randomly selected respondents.	Usually a small number of non-representative cases. Respondents selected to fulfil a given quota.

Data Collection	Structured techniques such as online questionnaires, on-street or telephone interviews.	Unstructured or semi-structured techniques e.g. individual depth interviews, group discussions or participant observations.
Data Analysis	Statistical data is usually in the form of tabulations (tabs). Findings are conclusive and usually descriptive in nature.	Non- statistical. Data analysis is interpretive which means it's a matter of the researcher's judgement. It seeks to explore the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of people to gain in-depth understanding.
Outcome	Used to recommend a final course of action.	Exploratory and/or investigative. Findings are not conclusive and cannot be used to make generalisations about the population of interest. Develop an initial understanding and sound base for further decision making.
Advantages	<p>Easy to conduct and measure and analyse data and results – cause and effect results are obtained.</p> <p>Filters out external factors so results are unbiased.</p> <p>Results can be generalised to the wider public.</p> <p>Objective results – hard data – Doesn't matter who conducts the research findings should be similar</p>	<p>Useful during early stages of a study when the researcher may be unsure of exactly what will be studied or what to focus on – focus groups.</p> <p>Doesn't need a strict research design plan before it begins which gives the researcher freedom to let the study unfold more naturally.</p> <p>Detailed and rich data is collected in the form of comprehensive written descriptions or visual evidence which looks at context and social meaning and how it affects individuals.</p> <p>Studies people in their natural setting which means results are 'closer' to reality.</p>
Disadvantages	<p>Ignores people's interpretation of the world around the meaning things have for different people. Thus, it is too simplistic.</p> <p>Highly reliant on statistics which don't always reflect society.</p> <p>Context of the study is ignored as it does not study people in their natural setting.</p> <p>Hard to always gather a large sample of the population; the larger the sample of people researched, the more statistically accurate the results will be.</p>	<p>Too subjective as the researcher is heavily involved in the research process which can influence their view of the study.</p> <p>Moreover, soft data is produced as results are interpreted according to researchers own bias -- thus, not reliable as there are problems with validity and generalisation</p> <p>Time consuming and expensive as interviews last at least an hour per person and can go on for months or years.</p>

Quantitative Vs. Qualitative – which works best?

- **Neither** method of research **is better** than the **other**.
- They are **different** and both have their **strengths** and **weaknesses**.
- The way to decide which one is **best suited** to a study depends on the **purpose** of the research itself and what it seeks to **accomplish**.

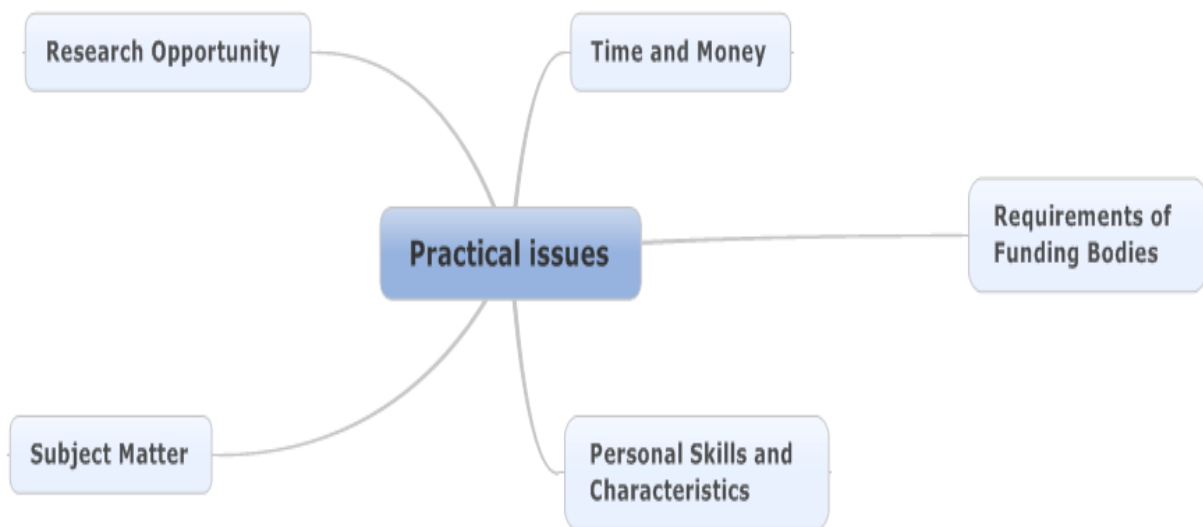
Can Primary and Secondary sources of data overlap with Quantitative and Qualitative methods?

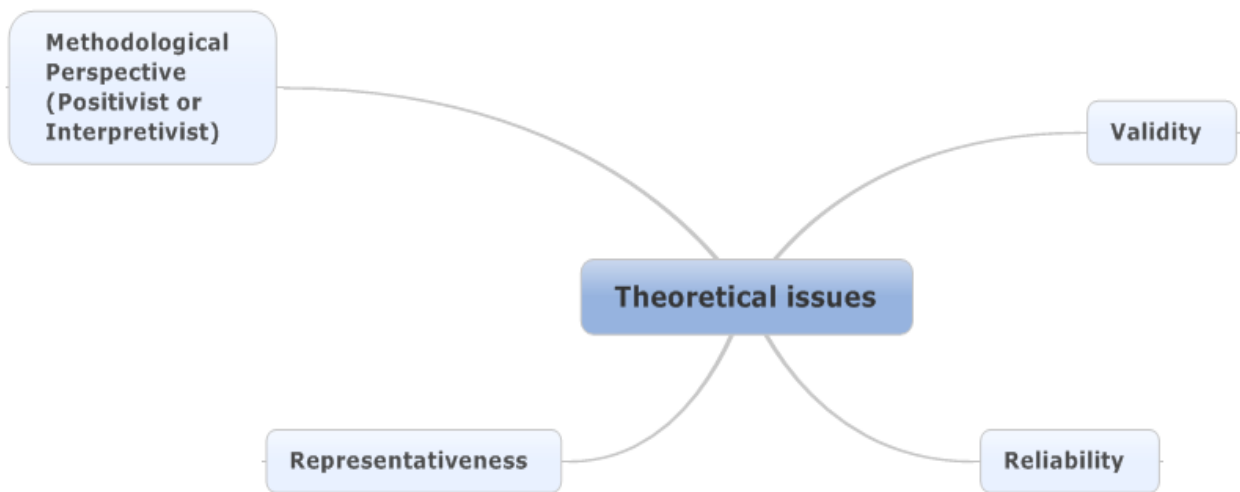
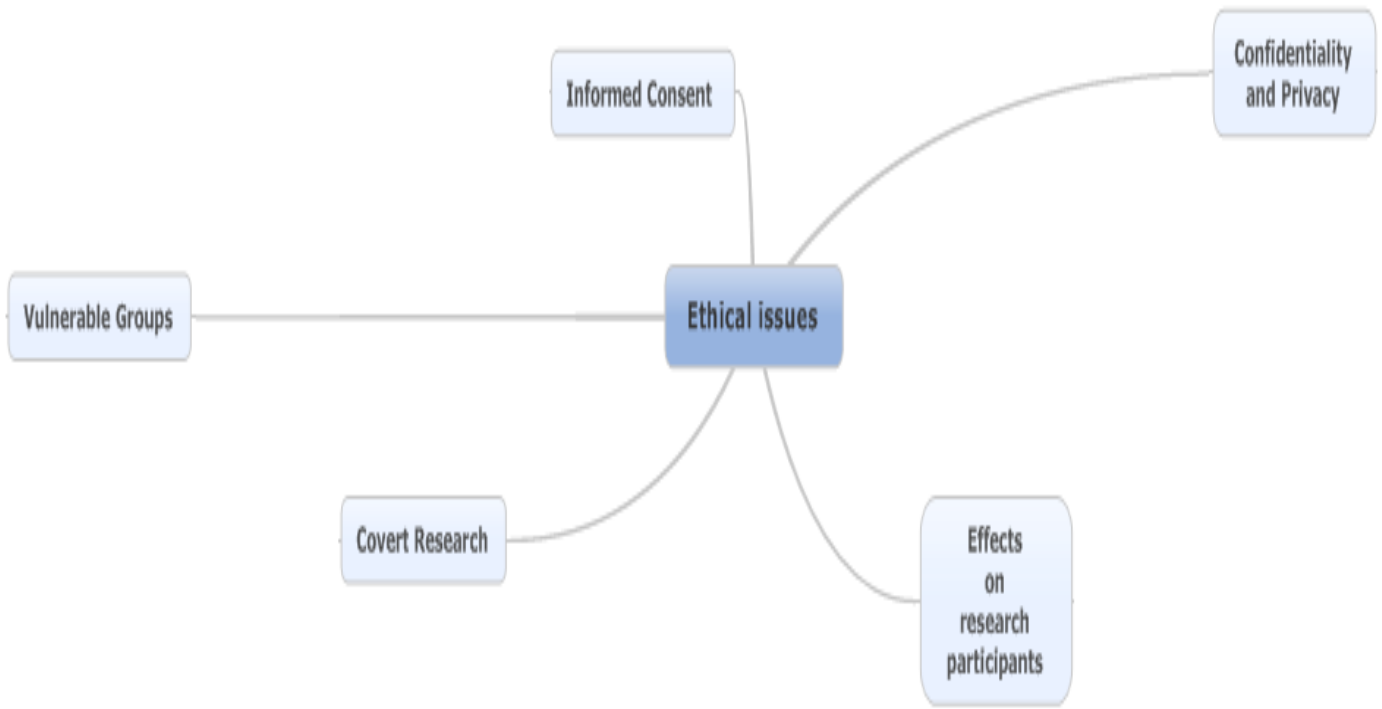
YES!

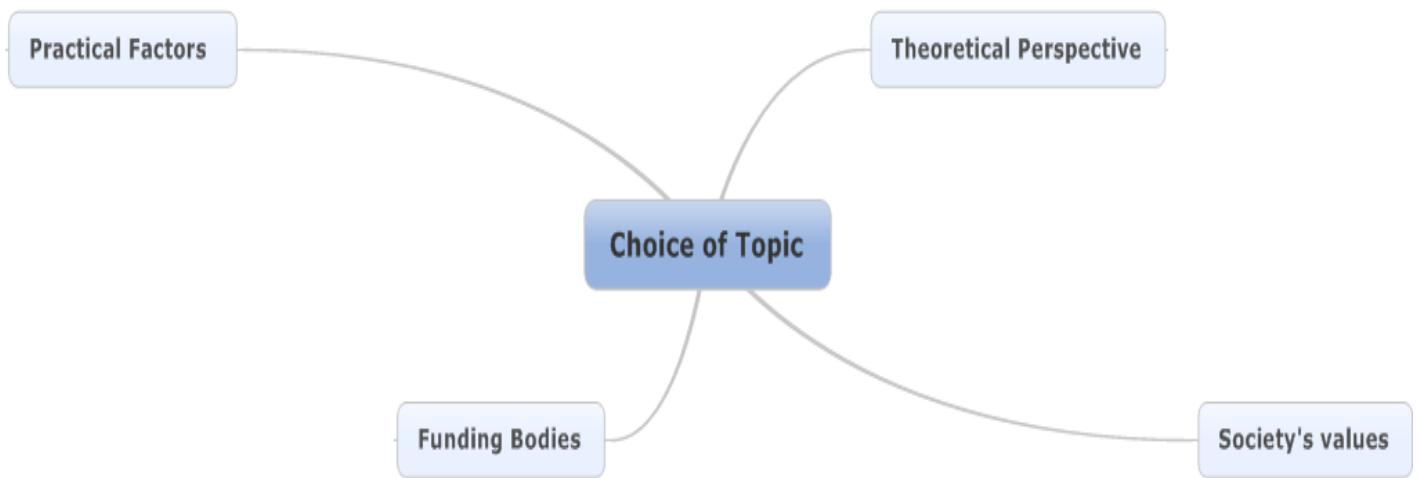
	Quantitative	Qualitative
Primary source	Questionnaires Structured interviews	Participant observation Unstructured interviews
Secondary source	Official statistics	Letters, newspapers, articles, pictures etc.

Factors influencing choice of methods

- Various factors influence a Sociologists choice of method. The most common are:
 - Practical issues
 - Ethical issues
 - Theoretical issues
 - Choice of topic







Research Method One; Experiments

- Experiments are more commonly used in Psychology and the Natural sciences. It involves testing the behaviour of participants and comparing results of two groups;
 - **The Experimental Group** – is exposed to the conditions of the experiment.
 - **The Control Group** – is **NOT** exposed to the conditions of the experiment and are not informed of this. In short, they are the placebo group.
- Logic of experiments is for scientists to manipulate variables in which they are interested to discover what effects they have.
- This method allows the researcher to develop a cause and effect relationship to predict or prevent future occurrences of behaviour.
- Experiments are mostly used by Positivist's since they favour scientific analysis.

❖ Evaluation of Experiments

1. Reliability

- Experiments increase reliability as they are easy to replicate by different researchers since there are certain steps and environmental conditions to follow and variables to manipulate.

2. Practical problems

- Society is complex and the social world is not easy to identify let alone manipulate it. E.g. if we wanted to study classroom interaction between 16 year olds is it best to observe them in a school or create an artificial classroom setting?
- Laboratory experiments cannot be used to study the past and compare social trends to contemporary society.
- Can only study a small sample which may not be representative of the whole population.

3. Ethical problems

- Researcher requires informed consent from research participants. However, this can be difficult to obtain from some groups like children or people with learning difficulties who may not fully understand the purpose of the experiment.
- Problems regarding the deception of participants since outlining the dull purpose of the research can lead to social desirability bias. E.g. Milgram's study of obedience.
- Experiments can also cause physical or psychological harm to participants depending on the nature of activities involved.

4. Social desirability bias

- A laboratory is not a natural environment. Thus, any behaviour within it can also be artificial since participants will try to guess what the study is about and act in the way they think the researcher may want them to behave.

5. Free will

- Assumes human action is deterministic like those of animals and plants and can be studied in the same way as natural sciences. Ignores free will and complex nature of human action.

❖ Two alternatives to the laboratory experiments

1. Field experiments

- Takes place in the participant's natural setting rather than an artificial laboratory setting.
- Participants are not usually aware they are being studied to reduce social desirability bias.
- The researcher manipulates one or two of the variables in the situation to see what effect it has on participants. E.g. Rosenthal and Jacobson's study of labelling in schools.

Evaluation

- Ethical issues – informed consent are not obtained and involve deception.
- Difficult to gain access into a participant's natural setting. E.g. criminal gangs
- Difficult to always manipulate variables in one's natural setting.

2. The Comparative Method

- This involves determining a cause and effect relationship by identifying two groups that are alike, besides the one variable we are interested in, and comparing the two groups together to determine causality.
- Thus, a real study does not even have to be conducted. A sociologist can simply compare the behaviour of two groups using existing primary or secondary data.
- E.g. Durkheim's study of suicide where he studied why different groups are more likely to commit suicide by looking at official statistics collected by coroners.
- This method avoids: 1) an artificial setting, 2) can be used to study the past. 3) no ethical issues.

Evaluation

- Less control over variable. Thus cause and effect can be difficult to determine.

Using Experiments to Investigate Education

- Sociologists use experiments to study the following issues: teacher expectations, classroom interactions, labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy.

Laboratory experiments and teacher expectation

- Harvey et al (1976) tested teacher's preconceived images of students from different social classes. They showed them photos of students and asked about their performance, parental attitude to education etc. They found that working class children were rated less favourably. To control other variable, photos were evenly distributed between gender and ethnicity.

Evaluation

Ethical problems

- Laboratory experiments don't have to use real children, so no harm is caused. However, where children are used there are problems gaining informed consent and possibility of causing psychological harm.

Narrow focus

- Laboratory experiments usually examine one specific issue. E.g. teacher expectation in regards to body language. While this gives detailed insight, it also ignores other factors involved within the process. Thus, doesn't give a full picture.

Practical factors

- Difficult to control all variables within a classroom. E.g. class size, streaming, type of school etc. This in effect raises questions of representatives, validity and generalisation.

Artificiality

- Artificial settings in laboratory experiments can't apply to the real world of education. Problems with generalising data obtained.

Field experiments and teacher expectations

- Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) studied teacher labelling and pupil self-fulfilling prophecy. They chose students of random ability and informed the teacher that one group of children were bright and could demonstrate rapid intellectual development, despite all children had the same ability. They found that the children labelled 'bright' made greater progress than students not so labelled, supporting labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy.

Evaluation

Ethical problems

- There are major ethical issues at stake. E.g. children labelled bright may make good progress but those labelled slow are harmed in effect.

Reliability

- Difficult to replicate field studies as each school, its structure and organisation is different. E.g. A private school would produce different results to a state school.

Broader focus

- Field experiments allow researchers to look into a broad range of issues that can come into play in the area they are interested in, contrary to laboratory experiments.

Research Method Two; Social Surveys

- Social surveys can be administered in two ways:
 - **Written questionnaires** – which respondents complete and return in person, post or email.
 - **Interviews** – either face-to-face or over the telephone.

- **Various steps need to be taken before a social survey can be administered to respondents:**

1. Choose a topic

- While surveys are used by Sociologists to study a wide variety of issues, it is not a suitable method for all topics. E.g. historical topics.

2. Formulate an aim or hypothesis

- **Aim:** statement which identifies what a sociologist intends to study. E.g. to collect data on gender and education.
- **Hypothesis:** more specific than the aim. It is a possible explanation that can be tested by collected evidence to prove it true or false. E.g. to test whether girls outperform boys at Duff Miller across all A-Level subjects.
- Both give the researcher direction on how to investigate their research, particularly the latter.

3. Select the types of questions you will ask

- All types of surveys, whether interviews or questionnaires require questions. Such questions can be asked in two specific ways;
 1. **Closed-ended questions** – respondent chooses from possible answers. E.g. 'yes', 'no', 'don't know' or multiple choice options.
 2. **Open-ended questions** – respondent is free to express their opinion as they please.

	Closed-ended questions	Open-ended questions
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Responses are easy to analyse and compare. ➤ Easy to replicate. ➤ Easy to complete for interviewers and interviewees. ➤ Are more specific, thus more likely to communicate similar issues. ➤ Higher response rate than open question surveys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Allows respondent to express themselves in their own words, reducing interviewer + social desirability bias. ➤ They can be used in a pilot study to formulate closed questions. ➤ Respondents will only answer if they 'know the answer' as opposed to picking anything from a list.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No flexibility in responses increasing investigator bias. ➤ Increases social desirability bias. ➤ Not always necessary. E.g. which state where you born in? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Requires greater effort from the respondent. ➤ Times consuming and expensive since replies are contradictory, incomprehensible or irrelevant. ➤ Different interviewers may record the different answer. ➤ Responses are varied which means low reliability.

4. Operationalise concepts

- Before we can formulate research questions, a Sociologist has to conceptualise and operationalise their ideas.
- **Conceptualisation** – involves the process of identifying concepts that will be examined. E.g. teacher speech, body language, eye contact with students to assess teacher expectations.
- **Operationalization** – involves the process of breaking down concepts into questions which can be measured. E.g. how do you encourage/motivate students with low self-esteem?

5. Conduct a pilot study

- A pilot study is a small scale trial study that is carried out. This is done prior to the main study to test that there are no flaws in the methodology of the main research. E.g. practise interviews or a draft questionnaire.

6. Select a sample

- The purpose of sampling is to ensure that people chosen for the study are representative of the research population or group we are interest in. This was results can be generalised to a wider population.

The Sampling Frame

- To select a sample we first need a sampling frame. This is a list of all the members of the population we are interested in. E.g. using school registers/data base to select the appropriate students for a study.

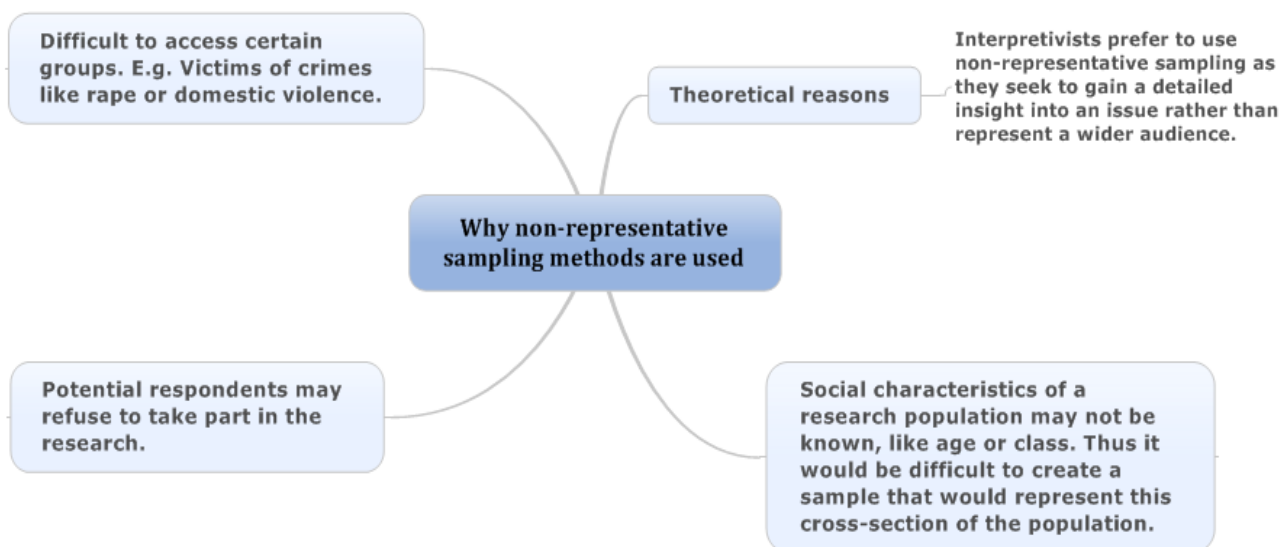
Sampling Techniques

- Below is a list of all the **representative** sampling techniques, mostly used in **quantitative** research:

Sampling Technique	How it works	Advantage	Disadvantage
Random Sampling	Simplest technique, where the sample is selected purely by random chance. E.g. names drawn from a hat.	Representative sampling planning is possible. Researchers can specify the size of the sample.	Expensive and time consuming. Always a chance that the sample selected is not truly representative.
Quasi-Random Sampling	Similar to random sampling. In this case every tenth or hundredth name is selected rather than any random one.	Possible to estimate extent to which sample findings are likely to differ from the population.	
Stratified Random Sampling	Population is divided into a number of parts or 'strata' according to characteristics chosen, like sex, ethnicity or age. A random sample is then drawn from each stratum and these are then put together.	Ensures a good cross selection of the population – more precise than random sampling. Not necessary for the sample to reflect composition of the population which saves time and is a good measure. Can be used in more complex studies where random sampling will be difficult & time consuming. Allows different sampling techniques to be used for different subpopulations.	Complex to organise and difficult to analyse results. Not useful with non-homogenous subgroups. Requires accurate information about the population, or can produce bias.
Quota Sampling	Similar to Stratified Random Sampling. But instead of choosing the samples for each stratum randomly, the researcher goes out to look for the right number of each sort of person required for each category. E.g. 500 men and 250 women.	Grantees inclusion of diverse population and proportions in which they occur in the population. Widely used in opinion polls as it produces 'close to reality' statistics. Quicker and cheaper than random sampling.	People may be unwilling to reveal personal details to see if they fit into a quota category. People in a given quota have an accidental chance of being selected for the study which isn't representative.

- Below is a list of all the **non-representative** sampling techniques, mostly used in **qualitative** research:

Sampling Technique	How it works	Advantage	Disadvantage
Opportunity Sampling	Sometimes called accidental, or convince sampling, involves choosing individuals who are easy to access. E.g. Studying first 100 men willing to take part.	Fast and cheap. Good for small scale studies, like studying your collage or local hospital.	Not representative. Usually avoided if a more satisfactory alternative is available. Many biases occur in such sampling procedure and there is no way to evaluate such bias.
Snowball Sampling	This is a multistage sampling procedure in which a small initial group is selected, 'snowballs', who then introduce the researcher to other potential members of the population that can take part. This way sample size increases.	Good to use when members are difficult to reach Sample size increases without much work being done by the researcher to find participants.	Networks connecting participants means the study becomes less representative. Not representative when it comes to larger groups of people who are not difficult to reach.



7. Decide whether it face to face, postal, online survey

- Various way to conduct surveys, particularly questionnaires. A researcher can select from using online, postal or face-to-face questions. Interviews can also be conducted online over skype. This gives researchers the flexibility of studying participants abroad without incurring high costs.

8. Conduct survey and analyse data

- Once all the research preparation is completed. The survey is given to the sample population to complete. Once this stage is over, it is the role of the Sociologist to analyse the data collected to try and understand why people behave in certain ways (Interpretivists) or look for statistical relationships (Positivism).

Research Method Three; Questionnaires

- Questionnaires are a list of a research or survey questions asked to respondents, as it is designed to extract specific information from them about a particular topic.
- There are different ways to administer questionnaires; online, post or face-to-face.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Practical advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Quick and cheap means of collecting data. ➤ A Large sample can be used. ➤ Data is easy to compare, analyse and evaluate. ➤ No need to recruit and train researchers. <p>Reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Easy to replicate and check for reliability. <p>Hypothesis Testing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Useful for testing hypothesis as it established cause and effect relationship between different variables. <p>Detachment and objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positivists argue questionnaires enable objectivity as the researcher is kept external to the research process. This is particularly the case for postal and online questionnaires. <p>Representativeness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Since questionnaires can gather information form a large sample, the results are subsequently more representative of the wider population. <p>Ethical issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Questionnaires pose fewer ethical problems than most research methods. However, while some questionnaires can be intrusive or sensitive, respondents don't have to answer them 	<p>Practical problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data tends to be limited and superficial since respondents are unlikely to complete and return long and time consuming questionnaires. <p>Response rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Low response rate, particularly among certain members of society. E.g. parents or full time workers which create a bias sample since most respondents are unemployed or socially isolated. ○ Postal and online questionnaires particularly have low response rates. <p>Inflexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Once questions are finalised they are difficult to change or ask follow up questions. Thus a narrow area is explored. <p>Detachment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interpretivists argue questionnaires lack validity and do not give a true picture of what's being studied since research. <p>Lying, forgetting and social desirability bias</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Problems with validity arise as respondents may fail to provide a correct answer, forget, not know or understand the question. ➤ Social desirability bias can also occur, where the researcher gives a response to please the researcher. <p>Imposing the researchers meanings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Questionnaires ignore meaning and experiences of respondents as questions are drawn by the researcher. This is particularly the case for closed questions which allows no flexibility.

Research Method Four; Interviews

- Interviewing is a research method in which the researcher asks questions orally and records the respondent's answers.
- Interviewing is typically done face-to-face, but can also be done via telephone.
- Interviews are usually one-to-one but can also be group ones too.
- There are two key types of interviews:
 - **Structured Interviews** – strict set of questions for the interviewer to ask and respondent to answer.
 - **Unstructured interviews** – are guided conversations. Interviewer is free to ask any questions.
 - **Semi-Structured Interviews** – lies between the two above extremes above. The interviewer has set questions but also scope to ask additional probing questions.

Structured Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Practical issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Training interviewers is straightforward and inexpensive since they have to follow a set of given instructions. However, this method is more costly than postal questionnaires. ➤ A larger number of participants can be studied in comparison to unstructured interviews. ➤ Suitable to gather factual information. E.g. age or occupation. ➤ Results are easy to compare and analyse as questions are closed ended. <p>Response Rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Higher response rates than questionnaires. ➤ Researcher can increase response rate by calling back participants. <p>Reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Easy to replicate as it uses same questions in the same order. <p>Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Valid data due to its use of close ended questions. 	<p>Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little opportunity for participant to explain questions in depth or clarify misunderstandings. <p>Social desirability bias</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respondents may pick one of the multiple choice answers to avoid looking 'stupid'. ➤ They can also lie and exaggerate responses. <p>Inflexible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Can result in interviewer bias as questions reflect the concerns and priorities of researcher rather than the participant.

Unstructured Interviews

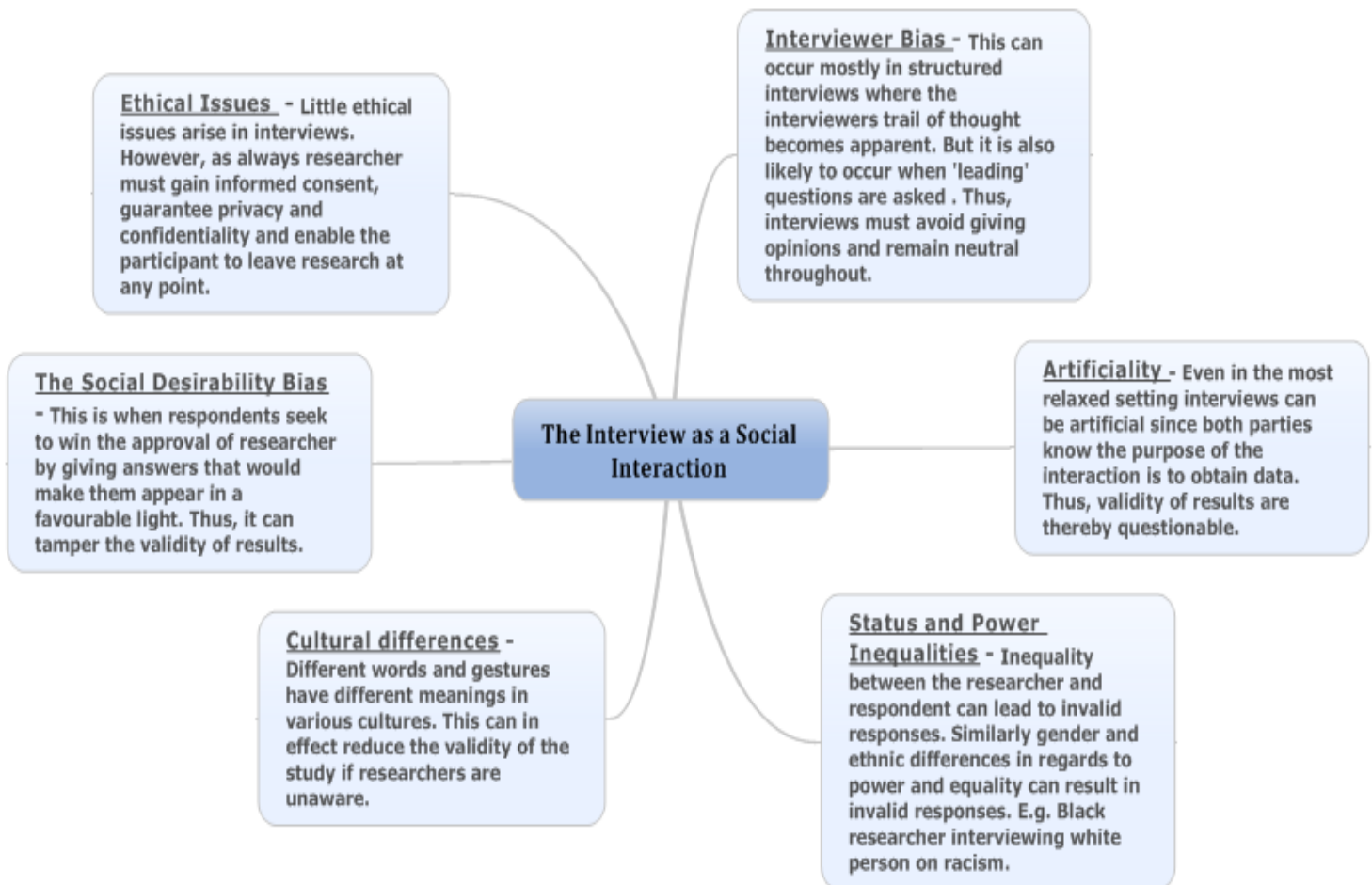
Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Rapport and sensitivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interviewer is likely to build a rapport with interviewee, putting them at ease and encouraging them to be truthful; avoids social desirability bias. ➤ Good for sensitive topics. E.g. domestic violence. <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No set questions, allowing participants the flexibility to draw on issues/ideas they believe are important, thereby reducing Interviewer bias. <p>Checking understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Researchers have the opportunity to ask questions when unsure, rather than select a multiple option. <p>Exploring unfamiliar topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enable researchers to explore an under researched area and can be for pilot studies. 	<p>Practical problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interviews are time consuming, limiting the number of participants that can be studied. <p>Representative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Small sample is obtained, in comparison to structured interviews, which means there is a higher chance of it being un-representative of wider population. Harder to make valid generalisations. <p>Reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Difficult to replicate the research and compare results. <p>Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rapport developed between interviewer and interviewee can distort data obtained; thereby leading to a lack of validity.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Obtains relevant data and allows flexibility for researcher to bring up additional information. ➤ Its structured aspect enables comparative analysis. ➤ Can be used for sensitive topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Time consuming and resource intensive. ➤ Can't guarantee honesty of participants. ➤ Flexibility of interview may lessen reliability. ➤ Difficult to compare and analyse answers.

Group Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants feel more comfortable in group interviews than one-to-one. Thus they are more likely to open up. ➤ Group discussions stimulate individual thought, enabling rich in-depth data. ➤ Useful method to generate initial ideas for a follow up research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ One or two individuals may dominate discussion. ➤ Researcher must keep group focused at all times. ➤ Peer group pressure can affect responses. ➤ Data generated is difficult to analyse.



Using Interviews to Investigate Education

- Sociologists use interviews to study the following issues: pupil subcultures, class, ethnicity and language, gender identity and schooling, class and parental choice.

Practical issues

- The linguistic and intellectual development of young people is less sophisticated in comparison to an adult, thus they may be:
 - More inaccurate or reluctant to talk.
 - Not understand long and complex sentences.
 - Maintain a limited vocabulary and use words incorrectly.
 - Read body language different to adults
- This can all impact the validity of the data obtained.
- Nevertheless, interviews are better than questionnaires in this respect since it allows young people the opportunity to clarify questions.

Access and Response Rate

- Problems can arise in accessing schools to study teachers and more importantly students. Thus, access has to be obtained from both Local Education Authority and School Head Teachers and well as parents in the case of students.
- Schools can also be reluctant to allow researchers into lesson as it is disruptive.

The interviewer as a 'teacher in disguise' and validity

- Interviews are often perceived as 'teachers in disguise' by students which can impact the validity of the data obtained, as they may not be truthful in their responses.
- To improve the validity of data obtained from students the following methods can be embraced;
 - Using open ended questions.
 - Not interrupting student's response.
 - Tolerating long pauses to allow them the opportunity to think.
 - Avoid asking leading questions as children are more likely to yield to pressure.
 - Avoid repeating questions as children tend to assume they have given the wrong answer.

Research Method Five; Participant Observation

❖ Types of Observations

- There are two way to distinguish between observations:

1. **Non-participant observation** - researcher observes the group or event without taking part. E.g. Ofsted inspections.

Vs.

Participant observation – researcher actually takes part in the event or everyday life of group while observing it simultaneously.

2. **Overt observations** – when researcher reveals their true identity.

Vs.

Covert observations - when researchers conceal their true identify and take on a fake identity instead.

○ Conducting a participant observation

- Two issues to address when conducting an observation:
 1. Getting access in, staying in and getting out of the group being studied.
 2. Whether to use overt or covert observations.

Gaining Access

- Some groups are easier to join than others. E.g. criminal gang vs. football crowd.
- **Making contact** – dependent upon the researcher’s personal skills, connections, or even pure chance.
- **Acceptance** – to retain entry researchers must be trusted and accepted by the group that they join. However, this is sometimes dependent on variables they cannot control like gender, sexuality and ethnicity. E.g. a Muslim cannot join EDL.
- **Observers role** – researcher should not disrupt the groups normal activity nor offer their opinions on issues.

Staying In

- In order to retain their role, researcher has to participate to an extent, particularly if it is covert research.
- **Going native** – by over-identifying with the group the researcher could become bias. If this occurs they lose objectivity and simply become a member of the group. Moreover, the longer an observer stays in a group, the less likely they are to observe unusual events or actions noteworthy.

Getting Out

- Leaving a group is usually easier than joining, but this is not always the case for covert research. E.g. trying to leave a criminal gang.
- Researcher can also find it difficult to adjust to their ordinary life if they stay in for too long.

Overt Observations

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Avoids the ethical problem of not obtaining informed consent and collecting data through deception. ➤ Allows researchers to ask naïve but important questions a covert researcher wouldn't be able to. ➤ The observer can openly take notes and wouldn't be affected by hindsight. ➤ Quick and simple to carry out in comparison to covert observations. ➤ Researcher can be open in what they are interested and why. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Groups can refuse permission for observations. E.g. criminal gangs or police force. ➤ Can lead to social desirability bias or the 'hawthorne effect' in which participants change behaviour knowing they are being observed. ➤ Can lead to interviewer effect and bias too.

Covert Observations

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enables researchers to study groups which cannot be easily accessed in their natural setting. E.g. criminal groups. ➤ Avoids social desirability bias or the 'hawthorne effect' as participants are not aware they are being observed to alter behaviour. ➤ Avoids interviewer bias. 	<p>Practical Problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Requires the researcher to keep up an act. There is always risk of their cover being blown. ➤ Sociologist cannot note take openly and can experience problems with hindsight when trying to recall information. <p>Ethical Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Informed concept is not gained, and on top of it participants are deceived. ➤ Psychological harm can be caused to participants upon finding out the true identity of researcher. ➤ Researchers have to lie about their reasons to leave the group. ➤ Researchers can participate in immoral or illegal activities. Even if they witness it, they have a moral/legal duty to intervene.

Participant Observation

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Practical advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sometimes participant observation may be the only way to study a group. E.g. deviant groups. ➤ Researchers can build rapport with participants and gain answers which reflect the truth the most in comparison to other methods. <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The most flexible approach in comparison to all the other research methods. It allows researcher to discover things other methods may have overlooked. <p>Insight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participant observation allows the researcher to gain empathy and thereby understand participant's experiences better. <p>Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increases validity since people are studied in their natural setting, rather than via an artificial questionnaire or lab experiment. 	<p>Practical disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Time consuming and expensive since researchers need to be fully trained before observations can begin. ➤ It can be personal stressful and demanding for researcher. ➤ Personal characteristics like gender, age and ethnicity can have an impact on certain groups studied. <p>Ethical problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Covert observations bring up serious ethical issues, from deception to psychological harm of participants. <p>Representativeness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Small groups can only be studied in observations which mean results gathered are not representative to wider society. <p>Reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Observations are difficult to replicate since each observation is unique. Thus, results are not reliable. <p>Bias, lack of objectivity and Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The term 'going native' implies obtaining objectivity is difficult. Thus, results reflect the subjectivity of the researcher and are not valid according to Positivists.

Using Observations to Investigate Education

- Sociologists use observations to study the following issues: gender and classroom behaviour, teacher labelling, pupil subcultures, racism and the hidden curriculum.
- **List the strengths of using observations in schools as well as the limitations. Think about practical, ethical and theoretical advantages and disadvantages when doing so.**

Secondary Sources

Secondary Sources

Quantitative Research

- Official statistics
- Non-official statistics
- Existing quantitative research

Qualitative Research

- Existing quantitative sociological research.
- Public documents.
- Personal documents.
- Historical documents.

Official Statistics

- Official statistics are quantitative data gathered by the government or other official bodies. E.g. National census conducted every ten years of UK population.
- Two ways to collect official statistics:
 1. **Registration** – when registering someone or for something. E.g. Birth or to school.
 2. **Official surveys** – e.g. National census or school surveys.

	Advantages	Disadvantages	
Practical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It allows comparison between different groups and trends over time. ➤ Saves time and money. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Statistics may not always be provided for each research area. ➤ Statistical trends can't always explain the reasons behind actions. ➤ Definitions are subjective which means official stats are not objective. E.g. crime has a different meaning for the police, courts, criminal and criminologist. 	
Representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Official stats cover a large proportion of the population and are thus more representative of wider society. E.g. census. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not all official stats are representative. E.g. British Crime Survey or General Household Survey is not compulsory for citizens to complete and return, unlike the UK census. 	
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Official stats are reliable as they can be easily replicated to reproduce similar results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ However, they may not always be reliable if participants don't make it clear which option they selected or researcher computing data can also make errors. 	
Validity; the 'dark figure'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ On the whole official stats that gather 'hard' data like population size, marriage or divorce rates generate valid data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ However, 'soft' data like police or school stats are all based on interpretation and are not always valid subsequently. 	
	Positivism	Interpretivism	Marxism
Official statistics and ideology;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ They prefer official statistics as it reflects 'Social facts'. ➤ It can be measured objectively. ➤ Data can be analysed and compared to find cause and affect relationships. ➤ Can be used to test a hypothesis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Official statistics lack validity since everything in society is socially constructed. ➤ Objectivity is impossible since everything is based on meaning and interpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Official statistics serve the interest of capitalists. ➤ It reflects their needs and thus lacks validity as it is a product of social construction rather than a real reflection of the truth.

Documents

- Documents refer to any written text, like personal diaries, government reports, medical records, newspapers etc.

1. Public and Personal Documents

- **Public documents** – created by organisations like government bodies, schools, welfare agencies etc. These documents may be available for researchers to use. E.g. Ofsted reports, school website, prospectus, textbooks etc
- **Personal documents** - includes letters, diaries, photo albums, autobiographies etc. These are first person accounts of social events and experiences which can be used to reveal meaning. E.g. notes written by students, homework, graffiti on school building/property, etc.

2. Historical Documents

- These are personal and public documents created in the past. Such documents allow us to study the past by also to draw comparative analyse with the present.

3. Content Analysis

- Is a method used to analyse the content of documents, usually used to study documents produced by the media, such as adverts and magazines.
- Although documents are qualitative, this method helps to generate quantitative data.
- Steps taken to conduct a content analysis of the media:
 - What category to study - e.g. full time housewives.
 - What source to study them in – e.g. TV or magazine?
 - Count the number of times they appear and how they are presented.
- **Advantages**; cheap, easy to access material, produces objective data that is scientific and quantitative.

❖ Questions to keep in mind when assessing documents:

- **Authenticity** – is the document what it claims to be? Is it in tact? Is it missing pages or passages?
- **Credibility** – who was the author? Could we trust the source?
- **Representativeness** – does the evidence in the document reflect other sources from the time period or is it fiction? Does it represent all groups in a given society or the minority?
- **Meaning** – researcher may need special skills to interpret the document. E.g. a foreign language or understanding of words that could change over time.
- **Advantages** – gives insight into the life of social actors, sometimes the only sources of information to study the past, cheap, easy to gather and saves time.

Documents	
Interpretivists	Positivists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Favour documents. ➤ Documents uphold validity, since they are not written with research in mind thus reflecting the truth. ➤ It provides qualitative data and gives insight into the author’s world and meanings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reject documents. ➤ Lacks reliability, representativeness and generalisation. ➤ Unreliable data since its subjective not objective. ➤ Interpreting documents imposes the view of the researcher.

Using Secondary Sources to Investigate Education

- Sociologists use secondary sources to study the following issues: ethnicity, class and gender achievement, school attendance, and truancy, league tables, racist incidents, national curriculum, stereotypes, and gendered subject choice.

Using official stats to investigate education	Using documents to investigate education
<p>Practical issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Saves time and money. ➤ Allows researcher to draw local or national comparisons of achievement differences between social groups and over time. ➤ However, not all stats are not collected for all areas and may not be useful to all researchers. E.g. one who wants to study student interaction. ➤ Also, stats can be effected by bias or reflect the interest of certain groups. <p>Representativeness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highly representative since all state schools have to complete a school census three times a year. ➤ However, ignores schools outside the state sector. <p>Reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Easy to replicate and discover causal relationships. ➤ However, when definitions change the reliability of official stats can be lost. <p>Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ According to Interpretivists stats are socially constructed and thus lack validity. 	<p>Practical issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Public documents are easy and cheap to access. ➤ They give researcher insight into everyday school experiences. ➤ However, personal documents are harder to access. <p>Ethical issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little or no ethical issues with public documents since they are there for public viewing. ➤ However, personal documents can be problematic as its confidential information. Thus informed consent is required. <p>Representativeness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ By law schools have to publish accurate information, thus public documents are representative. ➤ However, personal documents are less representative since it’s subjective. <p>Reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Public documents follow a systematic format and are easy to compare. ➤ However, errors made by staff computing such information can affect reliability of data. ➤ Personal documents, nevertheless, are less reliable and difficult to compare given they are subjective and have no clear format. <p>Validity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Documents can provide important insight into meaning held by teachers and students. ➤ However, all documents are open to interpretation and thus not valid.

Other types of research

1. Case studies

- Involves a detailed examination of a single case. E.g. schools, family or workplace.

Advantages

- Provides a detailed insight into a particular group, interaction or event.
- Can be used to study exceptional and unique cases. E.g. faith schools.
- Can be used to test a theory or hypothesis.

Limitations

- Since it studies one case in depth, it lacks reliability and representativeness which means results cannot be generalised.

2. Longitudinal study

- Involves a study which follows the same sample for an extended period of time. E.g. progress of 5 boys throughout their time in education.

Advantages

- Can trace development over time rather than a snapshot view of the present.
- Enables researchers to draw comparison between groups over time to identify different trends and causes.

Limitations

- Problems can arise tracking the sample. E.g. change of phone number and address.
- Participants may choose to leave the study.
- Demographic changes in the population may mean the original sample is no longer representative of the present population.
- Large amount of data can be difficult to analyse and costly to collect.

3. Life histories

- Involves collecting and recording individual experiences through 1) autobiographies and 2) semi-structured or unstructured interviews.
- It is a qualitative method that tries to understand how individuals construct and interpret the world.

Advantage

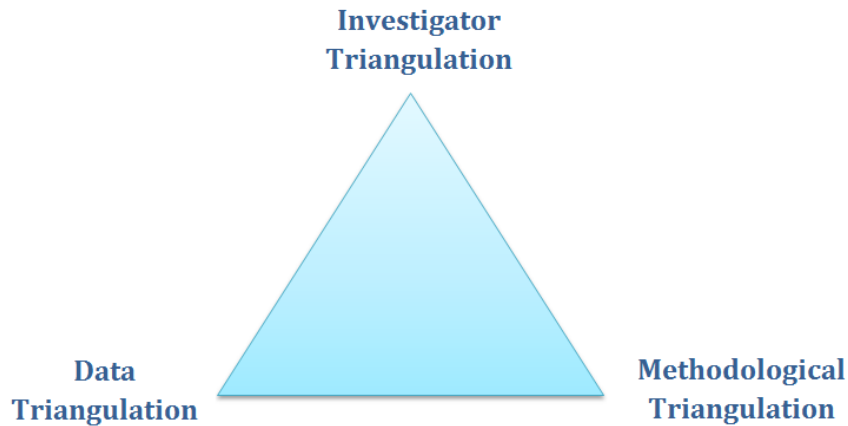
- Rich insight into individual experiences.
- No researcher or social desirability bias.

Disadvantage

- Life interviews conducted through interviews are subject to interview and social desirability bias.
- Time consuming.
- Very subjective data, not representative or reliable.

Triangulation

- Triangulation is the use of more than one research method when carrying out a sociological study, so different types of data can complement one another.
- Triangulation is also used to increase the validity and reliability of a study.
- Triangulation can take various forms:



1. **Investigator Triangulation** – involves using different researchers to check for investigator bias.
2. **Data Triangulation** – involves collecting data at different time from different people in different places to check for validity. It involves combining primary and secondary data.
3. **Methodological Triangulation** - takes two forms:
 - **Within-Method Triangulation** – involves using a variety of techniques within the same method to check validity and reliability. E.g. open and closed questions within a questionnaire.
 - **Between-Method Triangulation** – refers to a combination of different techniques

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advantage of one method compensates for the disadvantages of another. ○ Studying from different perspectives give a fuller picture. ○ Qualitative and quantitative data can be obtained ○ Increases reliability and validity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is time consuming ○ Expensive!

Researching Education

- Four Key areas to research in Education;

1. Researching Pupils

- Three major problems arise when studying young pupils in comparison to adults:

Power and status

- Students have little power and status due the hierarchal nature of schools. Thus they may find it difficult to challenge the opinions of those in power (teachers, head teachers etc.). It is therefore better to study them in group interviews rather than one-to-one interviews.

Ability

- Student's vocabulary, self-expression, thinking skills and confidence are likely to be limited in comparison to an adult. Thus, questions must be worded using basic and sympathetic language towards this age group.

Vulnerability and ethical issues

- It is difficult to gain informed consent from this age group, subsequently parents or teachers need to give such permission.
- Given the vulnerability of this age group, data must be kept private and confidential

2. Researching Teachers

- Teachers often perceive the classroom as their property; 'my classroom'. Thus, they don't like being observed and often put on a show as they are used to being inspected and scrutinised.

3. Researching Classrooms

- Classroom is a restrictive closed setting due its rules and layout. Teachers and students both hide their true thoughts and feelings from each other, thus they can conceal it from a researcher too. E.g. Ofsted inspections.

4. Researching Parents

- Little opportunity to study parents are they are external to the school. Thus, certain methods like observations cannot be used.
- Marketisation polices are also giving parents increasing opportunities to get involved with the workings of schools.