PET EVALUATION FOR DIFFERENT RESEARCH METHODS

FOR 10 AND 20 MARK QUESTIONS ON PAPER 1 AND 3

gROUP A

2016

**QUANTITATIVE METHODS**

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| **Define the method**  **Field Experiment**  **Applies the scientific method to experimentally examine an intervention in the real world (or as many experimentalists like to say, naturally occurring environments) rather than in the laboratory.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) ‘Pygmallion in the classroom’**  **Rosenhan (1973)** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Larger Scale Settings – Practically it is possible to do field experiments in large institutions – in schools or workplaces in which thousands of people interact for example, which isn’t possible in laboratory experiments.**  **Cheaper than a lab experiment.**  **Takes less time in general than a lab experiment** | **It is not possible to control variables as closely as with laboratory experiments – With the Rosenthal and Jacobson experiment, for example we simply don’t know what else might have influenced the ‘spurting group’ besides ‘higher teacher expectations’.**  **Practical Problems – Access is likely to be more of a problem with lab experiments. Schools and workplaces might be reluctant to allow researchers in.** |
| **Ethical**  **Less likely to harm participants than lab experiments.** | **Just as with lab experiments – it is often possible to not inform people that an experiment is taking place in order for them to act naturally, so the issues of deception and lack of informed consent apply here too, as does the issue of harm.**  **Unethical, since they involve carrying out an experiment on their subjects without their knowledge or consent.** |
| **Theoretical**  **Better external validity – The big advantage which field experiments obviously have better external validity than lab experiments, because they take place in normally occurring social settings.**  **Rosenthal and Jacobson research design was relatively simple and therefore easy to repeat. Within five years of the original study it had been repeated no less than 242 times.**  **Possess reliability- often have closely controlled conditions that make repetition possible.** | **However given all the many differences between school classes for example in terms of age of the pupils, teaching styles and so on, it is unlikely that the original could be replicated exactly.**  **The Hawthorne Effect (or Experimental Effect) may reduce the validity of results. The Hawthorne effect is where respondents may act differently just because they know they are part of an experiment.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain…. Two advantages of field experiments

[10]

Outline and explain…. Two disadvantages of field experiments

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view… That field experiments are more useful than any other method in sociological research.

[20]

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| **Define the method**  **Lab Experiments**  **Is an experiment conducted under highly controlled conditions. The variable which is being manipulated by the researcher is called the independent variable and the dependent variable is the change in behaviour measured by the researcher** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Stanley Milgram(1974)**  **Zimbardo**  **Banduro** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Can be cheap once set up as you can just rise and repeat, as is the nature of lab experiments.** | **Society is very complex. Therefore it is impossible to identify, let alone control, all the possible variables that might exert an influence on, say a child’s educational achievement or a worker’s attitude to work.**  **Lab experiments cannot be used to study the past, since by definition it is impossible to control variables that were acting in the past rather than the present.**  **Lab experiments only use small scale samples. This makes it very difficult to investigate large scale social phenomena such as religious or voting patterns for example. This reduces its representativeness.**  **Needs time to train the experimenter.** |
| **Ethical**  **Less deception than field experiments, in general.** | **Lack of informed consent, as a general principle, the researcher needs the informed consent of the research participants. However this is difficult to achieve with vulnerable groups.**  **Deception: it is also generally considered wrong to mislead people as to the nature of the experiment, as Stanley Milgram did in his famous studies of obedience to authority. Milgram lied to his research participants about the purpose of the research, telling them that they were assisting in an experiment on learning, in which they were ordered by the researcher to administer socks when the learner failed to answer correctly. In reality the purpose of the research was to test people’s willingness to obey orders to inflict pain.**  **Harm: The experiment may also harm the participants. In Milgram’s experiments, many research participants were observed to seat, stutter, tremble, groan and bit their lips.** |
| **Theoretical**  **High reliability – Once an experiment has been conducted, other scientists can then replicate it. The lab experiment is therefore highly reliable, producing the same results each time.**  **It allows the researcher to identify and measure behaviour patterns quantitatively and to manipulate variables to establish cause-and-effect relationships.**   * **They enable scientists to test their hypotheses in controlled conditions.** * **They make it easy to isolate and manipulate variables to determine the causes of events.** | **The Hawthorne Effect: A laboratory is not a natural environment. Thus behaviour is likely to be unnatural and so become invalid results. Also if people know they are being studied, they may produce demand characteristics and or try and figure out the aim of the experiment by doing behaviours which correspond to the aim they believe is being measured.**  **Free Will: Interprivists argue that humans are fundamentally different from anything else studied by natural scientists. This means our behaviour cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect and so the lab experiment is irrelevant to them for sociological evidence.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain…. Two reasons why experiments are often associated with the positivist approach in sociology

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view… That Lab experiments are more useful for sociological evidence in crime.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view of positivists in lab experiments [20

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| **Define the method**  **Official Statistics**  Numerical data where the objective is to quantify some aspects of an individual, group or society.  **Official statistics** arenumerical data collected from the government. They can be both ‘hard’ e.g. death records and ‘soft’ e.g. measures of poverty. | **Example of studies that have used it**   * Emile Durkheim; "Suicide: A Study In Sociology", 1897, used official statistics drawn from coroners' reports from different societies to establish that suicide rates varied within and between societies * Rowntree foundation studied crime * Census data, collected every 10 years |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * Frequently the only available data e.g. Emile Durkheim study of suicide, used official statistics from coroner’s report to establish suicide rates in different cultures. * Readily available and cheap to use, analysis is quick. * Comprehensive in coverage * Over a time span, allows examination of trends * Can be used for before and after studies e.g. to judge effect of the government policies on reducing inequalities in health or educational achievement. | * The government create statistics for its own purposes, not for the benefit of sociologists, so there may not be any data on the topic being researched * There might be mismatches between sets of statistics because two sets of data could cover slightly different areas which can make it impossible to make a correlations * Definitions that the state uses may differ to those of which sociologists would use. * The measure may have changed over the years, which makes comparison difficult. |
| **Ethical**   * Avoid ethical issues, as the research does not need to go face to face with the participant. * The data is not linked to named people anonymous and confidential. | * The collection of some statistics can have harmful effects. For example the introduction of school league tables and that schools are required to publish their results has led to a decline in creativity and education being more stressful for students and teachers * The collection of statistics could really be about surveillance and control |
| **Theoretical**   * It shows trends over years which positivists think this is important. * It is reliable as it can often be repeated over many years which positivists would favour. * The statistics are representative there can often represent very large groups which would be favoured by positivist. * Allows for comparison between different types of data * Can help build the hypothesis for the study by giving secondary data that will help the researcher think about their topic | * Some official statistics lack validity because some crimes go under-reported such as rape and domestic violence * The way that some social trends are measure changes over time which can make comparisons with the past difficult * They may also lack validity because they are collected by the state which means the state can change things to make it look better than they actually are, for example changing the definition of unemployment can then make the percentage of unemployment look less on survey |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….

Two advantages of using official statistics in sociological research. [10]

Outline and explain two problems with using official statistics in sociological research

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view…

That using official statistics is an accurate way of gathering data of crime [20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that positivists favour the use of official statistics because of their reliability.

[20]

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| **Define the method**  **Non-participant observation (covert and overt) -**researchers take a ‘fly on the wall approach’ and observe individuals and groups without getting involved in the life of the group.  **Overt** is where the group being studied know they are being observed  **Covert**is where the group being studied does not know they are being observed, or where the research goes ‘undercover’ | **Example of studies that have used it**   * Study in a school in America – studied whether the way the teachers acted with students influenced their achievement. * Ronald King 1984 – tried to blend into the background in an infant school and spent short periods of time in the classroom. |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  Gaining access is easier with non-participant observation than participant observation although it would still be relatively difficult to get schools and teachers to agree to access  Structured observations are relatively quick to carry out and don’t require much training on the part of the researcher.  Funding would be more likely than with more unstructured forms of observation | * Time – covert; the researcher would have to spend a lot of time to gather worthwhile data. Overt; may take more time due to people acting differently regarding their presence. * Access – some groups may be harder to access than others e.g. prisoners, young children or mentally ill patients (harder for covert sociologists). * Personal skills – overt; sociologists need to collect data without intervening with their respondents. |
| **Ethical**  It is not a secret that there is a researcher present so no issues of spying - Overt | * Vulnerable groups will respond differently to research being collected – overt; mentally ill or young children may feel uncomfortable, threatened or curious to their presence. * Deception – covert; increases likelihood of false reports or complaints (parents of young children). * Safety of participants/researcher may be compromised – mostly overt. |
| **Theoretical**  Reliability is good if the observation is structured because someone else can repeat the research looking for the same things.  Representativeness is easier than with unstructured observations because they are quicker to do thus larger samples can be achieved.  In contrast to questionnaires non-participant observation allows the researcher to see what people do rather than what people say they do.  The potential problem of an observer effect is avoided precisely because the group are unaware they're being studied. The researcher, therefore, can safely assume they really are observing people's "normal behaviour - Covert | * Representation – the researcher can only witness what happens in front of them; lacks representation due to only seeing snippets. * Reliability – lacks this as people won’t act exactly the same a short/long period of time after the researcher’s first observation; different results would be gained. * Validity – Covert; people will be unaware of the researcher’s presence so they would act no differently to how they naturally would (no Hawthorne effect). Overt; people would be aware of the researcher’s presence and would therefore alter their actions and behaviour to how th3ey think the researcher wants them to or the opposite (Hawthorne effect). * Interviewer effect – the researcher needs to be aware of how their presence affects people’s behaviour. * Value freedom – the researcher may have prejudice against the people they’re |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two advantages of using Non-participant observation

[10]

Outline and explain two disadvantages of using Non-participant research

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that Covert Non-participant observation is more effective than Covert Participant observation

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that Non-participant is the best method to investigate students performances within schools

[20]

**QUALITATIVE METHODS**

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| **Define the method**  **Participant observation:** a primary research method in which the sociologist studies a group by taking a role within it and participating in its activities.  Overt: Willis, Venkatesh  Covert: James Patrick  **Can form part of an ethnography e.g. Willis, Venkatesh** | **Example of studies that have used it**  Interpretivists are more likely to use this method as it easy to observe behaviour and find meanings behind the patterns.  Learning to Labour by Paul Willis (1977) is an ethnographic study of twelve working class ‘lads’ from a school in Birmingham conducted between 1972 and 1975. He spent a total of 18 months observing the lads in school and then a further 6 months following them into work. The study aimed to uncover the question of how and why “working class kids get working class jobs” (1977: 1) using a wide range of qualitative research methodologies from interviews, group discussions to participant observation, aiming to understand participants’ actions from the participants’ point of view in everyday contexts. |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * Sometimes participant observations may be the only viable method for studying certain groups, particularly those engaged in activities that wider society sees as deviant or disreputable. Enables the sociologist to build a **rapport** with the group and gain its trust. | * **Gaining access** to a group in covert observations may be difficult. * Observations can be **very time consuming** and require funding. It can be time consuming to form a rapport with the participants in order to get valid data. * Participant Observation also requires **observational and interpersonal skills** that not everyone possesses – you have to be able to get on with people and understand when to take a back seat and when to probe for information. Also need to have characteristics that would allow you to access the group e.g. gender, ethnicity, age. * Getting in, staying in and getting out can be challenging. * Can be hard to record data, especially if covert. |
| **Ethical**   * **Interpretivists** prefer this method because it is respondent led – it allows respondents to speak for themselves and thus avoids a master-client relationship which you get with more quantitative methods. * **Overt: consent is gained.** Participants could choose not to engage with you if they wished. * **Can help highlight real lives of stigmatised groups.** | * In covert observations it is very unethical as the researcher has to **lie** to the participants. They also don’t know they are being observed so cant **withdraw** at any time. * In overt observations you need to get **informed consent**. This may be difficult when observing groups such as children or gangs. * **Legality** can also be an issue in covert research where researchers working with deviant groups may have to do illegal acts to maintain their cover. * Could be issues with safety e.g. Patrick ended up taking drugs to fit in. |
| **Theoretical**   1. **Validity:** what people say they do when asked in a questionnaire, and what they actually do in real life, are not always the same thing. By contrast, by actually observing people we can obtain rich qualitative data that provides a picture of how they really live. Supporters of participant observation argue that this is the methods main strength, and most of its other advantages are linked to this. 2. **Insight:** the best way to truly understand what something is like is to experience it for ourselves. This allows the researcher to gain empathy through personal experience. Will give insight into their lives, meanings and viewpoints by actually living it. 3. **Flexibility:** much more flexible. Rather than starting with a hypothesis, it allows the sociologist to enter the situation with a relatively open mind about what they will find. As new situations are encountered, new explanations can be formulated and the sociologist can change direction to follow them up there and then. In this way, any theories that the researcher produces are ‘grounded’ in real life. This open mindedness allows the researcher to discover things that other methods may miss. | * **Demand characteristics**: people may change their behaviour if they know they are being watched. This mainly occurs in overt observations. This can also be known as the **Hawthorne effect** * Only a **small number** of people can be observed at one time so this makes observations **unrepresentative.** This means we cannot generalise it. Samples are often collected through the snowball effect making it an unrepresentative sample. * Observation studies cannot be replicated so results can’t be checked. It is therefore difficult to compare results to other studies. This means observations are **not reliable**. They are also not reliable as an observation relies on the characteristics and qualities of the researcher. * Critics also question how valid participant observation really is. They argue the method **lacks objectivity**. It can be very difficult for the researcher to avoid subjectivity and forming biased views of the group being studied. Also researchers decide what is significant and worth recording and what’s not, therefore, it depends on the values of the researcher. In extreme cases, researchers might ‘go native’, where they become sympathetic with the respondents and omit any negative analysis of their way of life. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two advantages of participant observations [10]

Outline and explain two practical disadvantages of participant observations [10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that participant observation is the best way to find out about hidden or hard to access groups [20]

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| **Define the method**  **Semi-structured Interviews:** Interviews which have the same set of questions in common, but the interviewer can also push for more information and ask additional questions. | **Example of studies that have used it**   * Hauari and Hollingworth- Study on fatherhood. * Dobash and Dobash- Domestic violence. |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * The interviewer is able to check the understanding of the participant in case they do not understand a question. This is because it is not as formal as structured interviews. * You are able to explain the purpose of the research so you able to gain access as a result of this. * The training for the interviewer is very cheap and straight forward to do. * Relatively cheap to interview a reasonable size sample. | * It is time consuming having to interview a lot of people, and it can take a lot longer than structured interviews. * It can be quite expensive to carry out if in large sample sizes. * May be hard to study a particular group or subject. * Interviewer needs interpersonal skills, to be able to get a full answer and gain a rapport in order to get an answer which will be useful for them. |
| **Ethical**   * When someone participates, consent is gained. * It is easier to explain the aims and purposes of the interviews conducted; therefore, people know the agenda and are kept in the loop. * Good for sensitive issues, which allows the participants to elaborate on their answers if necessary. E.g. a topic on violence against wives. | * Hard to gain access without consent, and if there isn’t any consent, then no interview will go ahead. Especially hard when wanting to interview children. * Could be an imposition problem, which could be distressing for some interviewees. This could mean they may want to stop the interview, and the information gathered may not be useful. * Can be difficult to anticipate direction of interview if interviewer asks additional questions. |
| **Theoretical**   * They are valid, as people are able to expand on their answers and the researcher can encourage participants to go into more detail, so gives a true picture. * Provides some comparable data from the standardised questions. Allows more comparison than in unstructured interviews. * Allow the interviewer to build a rapport and verstehen with the researcher. This means trust is built, so they are more likely to open up about their answers. * More in depth answer with a large amount of detail. | * Lack of reliability as interviewee could change their decision as questions could be open-ended questions. * Unlikely to be representative, as semi-structured interviews take time, so won’t be able to interview loads of people. (Small sample). * A little bit of interviewer bias, if researcher asks additional questions (Lacks validity). * Harder to analyse due to lack of closed questions. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two advantages of using semi-structured interviews in sociological research.

[10]

Outline and explain two disadvantages of using semi-structured interviews in sociological research.

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using semi-structured interviews in sociological research.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of semi-structured interviews when studying streaming.

[20]

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| **Define the method**  **Documents**  **Secondary data which includes letters, emails, diaries, photographs, novels, newspapers and the internet.**  **Public documents are produced by organisations such as government departments, schools and charities.**  **Personal documents include things like letters, diaries and autobiographies. They are first-hand accounts of social events and personal experiences.** | **Example of studies that have used it**   * **Louise Archer – Working-class pupils’ identities and school – photo diary** * **Paul Willis – working-class ‘lads’ – diaries** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **Can be the only source of information from the past – cannot interview someone if they have passed away for example.** * **Free/ cheap source of data** * **Public documents are usually easy to access and available to everyone** * **You can carry out content analysis and come to certain conclusions** | * **Personal documents can be difficult to access as some documents are confidential.** * **Notes not always easy to obtain, as people can hide them.** * **May not know they exist e.g. people’s family photos etc.** |
| **Ethical**   * **Don’t need to gain consent to use public documents as they are already available for everyone to access** * **You can gain consent from participants to use their documents; such as photographs, diaries etc, as it wouldn’t affect your findings** * **You can keep participants data confidential and private by not including their names in your study.** * **Most public data is confidential already so privacy would not be a problem** * **Participants can always remove their documents from your study if they changed their mind about participating** | * **Permission for use is not required from archives, however some people may not want their documents used in particular ways.** |
| **Theoretical**   * **Can be used to provide another source of data as they offer an extra check on the results you obtain by primary methods – increases validity** * **Interpretivists favour personal documents such as diaries and letters as it enables the researcher to get an insight into the participant’s reality; their thoughts and feelings towards certain aspects of life – this also increases validity** | * **Personal documents are often less representative i.e. collected in an unsystematic way.** * **Deliberate falsifications or accidental mistakes made i.e. when teachers write reports they may vary the criteria, therefore not reliable.** * **Positivists are critical of documents because they include the subjectivity of the original writer.** * **May only reflect what the person wanted to show e.g. photo diaries by young people in Archer’s study reflect only carefully selected aspects of their identity.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….

**2 disadvantages of using documents in sociological research**  [10]

Outline and explain two advantages of using documents in sociological research

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view…

[20]

**…that ethical factors are more important than practical and theoretical factors when using documents when carrying out sociological research.**

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that interpretivists favour the use of documents in sociological research as they may provide the only access to information possible.

[20]