

Chapter 2 Education

Topic 4 Gender differences in education

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Activity: Research

Investigating pupils' aspirations

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- Identify factors that influence students' aspirations.
- Compare and contrast the aspirations of boys and girls using primary research.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews in investigating students' aspirations.

A. The research issues

First read the text on pages 52-53 of your textbook, on Girls' changing ambitions.

Your research involves conducting interviews to look at the aspirations of male and female students.

You need to consider some key research issues:

1. Career and life plans in five to ten years' time
2. The importance of having a career
3. Any problems or obstacles they may see to their plans
4. Their ability to overcome these obstacles
5. The importance of family now and the importance of having a family in the future.

B. In groups of three

Use the text on pages 52-53 for further help in formulating your interview questions and how you might use some probing follow-up questions to gain more in-depth information.

You need to interview both boys and girls so you can compare and contrast their responses to note any gender differences.

You might also consider interviewing students from different social classes. Ask them which social class they feel they belong to and give them a choice of answers (e.g. middle class; working class).

C. The method

You will carry out semi-structured interviews with pupils to determine their aspirations in education. (Look at page 125 of your textbook, which gives further details on semi-structured interviews).

Allocate the roles in your research group as follows:

1. The interviewer, who asks pre-prepared and follow-up questions and makes the interviewee feel at ease and builds rapport. Think about what kind of person you are going to interview and which of you is more likely to establish the kind of relationship that will encourage them to open up.
2. The recorder, who makes sure the interview is recorded. You can use pen and paper or an audio recorder. Remember, you must get the interviewee's consent to record their answers. This will include explaining the purpose of your research and what you are going to do with their answers, as well as guaranteeing them anonymity.
3. The observer, who makes notes on any other aspects of the interview such as body language, tone of voice, emotional response, the physical setting etc. Also makes notes on the effectiveness of the interviewer in gaining information from the interviewee.

D. The write-up

Share your results as a class.

Write a summary of the conclusions you were able to make as a class.

Did your class results support the studies described on pages 52-53?

E. Methods in context

Drawing on your class's experience of conducting this research, write a brief summary of the strengths and limitations of using semi-structured interviews to study pupils' aspirations using information from the observers.

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