WORKBOOK FOR AQA A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY BOOK ONE

Student Workbook for Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODS

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TOPIC 1 Choosing a research method

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know what the main types of data are and what research methods sociologists use.
- Understand the practical, ethical and theoretical factors influencing choice of method and topic, and be able to assess their relative importance..
- Understand the difference between positivist and interpretivist approaches to research.

Getting Started (page 90)

Write your answers to the Getting Started activity here.

A1.

A2.

A3.

A4.

B1.

B2.

C1.

C2.

Primary and secondary sources of data (page 91)

Complete the following table:

External factor	Definition	Examples
Primary data		
Secondary data		

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Application (page 91)

Tick the correct columns for each source of data:

Source of data	Primary source	Secondary source	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
field experiments				
paintings				
exam league tables				
school reports				
divorce statistics				

Factors influencing choice of methods (pages 92-95)

Practical issues (page 92)

Summarise each of the following practical issues:

a. Time and money

b. Requirements of funding bodies

c. Personal skills and characteristics

d. Subject matter

e. Research opportunity

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Ethical issues (page 93)

Summarise each of the following ethical issues:

a. Informed consent

b. Confidentiality and privacy

c. Harm to research participants

d. Vulnerable groups

e. Covert research

Activity: Discussion *Should research always be ethical?* (page 93)

Write a summary of the discussion here.

1.

2.

Theoretical issues (pages 93-94)

Summarise each of the following theoretical issues:

a. Validity

b. Reliability

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c. Representativeness

d. Methodological perspective

Application (page 93)

Write your answers here

1.

2.

Factors influencing choice of topic (page 95)

Summarise the following factors influencing choice of topic:

a. The sociologist's perspective

b. Society's values

c. Practical factors

d. Funding bodies

Activity: Research *Perspective and choice of method* (page 95)

Complete the table below.

Research topics	**Theoretical perspective** e.g. functionalism	**Explanation**
Teacher labelling and the effect on educational achievement		

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Gender and subject choice in school		
The benefits of introducing voucher systems in education		
How school reproduces existing social class inequalities in society		
Benefits of the education system for individuals in selecting them for work roles		

Box 13 Triangulation (page 95)

Give an example of triangulation and explain how this would give a more rounded picture when carrying out research.

The process of research (pages 95-98)

Formulating an aim or hypothesis (page 95-96)

Complete the following table:

Advantages of a hypothesis	Advantages of an aim

Application (page 96)

Write your operational definitions of the concepts here.

(a)

(b)

(c)

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The pilot study (page 96)

Summarise the reasons why sociologists may use a pilot study.

Samples and sampling (pages 96-97)

Explain the following:

a. The purpose of sampling

b. Representativeness

c. The sampling frame

Box 14 The biggest blunder in survey history? (page 97)

Using material from Box 14, explain why it is important to have a complete and accurate sampling frame.

Sampling techniques (page 97)

Place each of the sampling techniques on page 97 on the line to indicate its likely representativeness.

Most representative *least representative*

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Non-representative sampling (pages 97-98)

1. List the reasons for using a non-representative sample.

a.

b.

c.

2. Define the following sampling techniques and briefly explain why they would not be representative:

a. Snowball sampling

b. Opportunity sampling

3. Explain why interpretivists do not see representativeness as important.

Box 15 Case studies (page 98)

Give four uses that sociologists can make of case studies.

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QuickCheck Questions (page 99)

Write your answers to the questions here.

1a.

1b.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6a.

6b.

7a.

7b.

8.

9.

10a.

10b.

10c.

Now answer the Questions to try on page 99 of your textbook.

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TOPIC 2 Education: the research context

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the main characteristics of education as a context for sociological research.
- Understand some of the problems and opportunities that researching educational issues presents for sociologists.
- Be aware of some of the research strategies sociologists use to investigate education.

Getting Started (page 100)

Write your answers to the Getting Started activity here.

A1.

A2.

A3.

A4.

A5.

A6.

B.

Research characteristics (pages 101-106)

How might the researcher's own personal characteristics affect the research? Explain your answer.

Analysis and evaluation (page 102)

Write your answers here.

1

2.

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Box 16 Ethical research practice and children (page 102)

List the specific ethical issues associated with researching children that Barnardo's identifies.

Application (page 103)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

Application (page 103)

Write your answer here.

Activity: Research *Using school documents* (page 104)

Write a summary of your research here.

1.

2.

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Application (page 105)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

Activity: Research *Characteristics of groups and settings in education* (page 106)

Write a summary of the discussion here.

a. Pupils

b. Teachers

c. Classrooms

d. Schools

e. Parents

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QuickCheck Questions (page 107)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

(a)

(b)

6.

7.

8.

9.

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TOPIC 3 Experiments

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the similarities and differences between different types of experiments.
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of experiments.
- Be able to apply their understanding of experiments to the study of education.

Getting Started (page 108)

Write your answers to the Getting Started activity here.

A1.

A2.

A3.

B1.

B2.

B3.

C.

Laboratory experiments (pages 109-111)

Define the following terms:

1. The experimental group

2. The control group

3. The independent variable

4. The dependent variable

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Application (page 109)

Write your answer here.

Reliability (page 109)

Suggest two reasons why data from laboratory experiments may be high in reliability.

1.

2.

Practical problems (page 109)

Identify three practical problems of laboratory experiments.

1.

2.

3.

Ethical problems (page 110)

Identify three ethical problems of laboratory experiments.

1.

2.

3.

Box 17 Positivism, interpretivism and experiments (page 110)

1. Suggest two reasons why positivists might favour laboratory experiments.

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2. Identify two problems of using laboratory experiments in sociological research.

3. Why do interpretivists reject the use of laboratory experiments?

4. Why might interpretivists favour field experiments?

Analysis and evaluation (page 110)

Write your answer here.

Free will (page 110)

Why might the fact that humans have free will be a problem for sociological research using the experimental method?

Field experiments (page 111)

Identify two differences between field experiments and laboratory experiments.

1.

2.

Activity: Research *Carrying out a field experiment* (page 111)

Write a summary of your research here.

1.

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2.

3.

4.

The comparative method (page 111)

What are the two steps involved in carrying out a 'thought experiment'?

1.

2.

Activity: Webquest *Testing Durkheim's theory of suicide* (page 111)

Write a summary of your findings here.

QuickCheck Questions (page 112)

Write your answers below.

1.

2.

3.

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4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Now answer the Questions to try on page 112 of your textbook.

Methods in context - using experiments to investigate education (pages 113-115)

Laboratory experiments and teacher expectations (pages 113-114)

1. Summarise the following problems of using laboratory experiments to study teacher expectations:

a. Ethical problems

b. Narrow focus

c. Practical problems

d. Artificiality

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Analysis and evaluation (page 114)

Write your answer here.

Field experiments and teacher expectations (page 114)

Write a sentence to summarise each of the following problems of Rosenthal and Jacobson's field experiment:

a. Ethical problems

b. Reliability

c. Validity

d. Broader focus

Now answer the Question to try on page 115 of your textbook.

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TOPIC 4 Questionnaires

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the different types of question used in questionnaires and different methods of administering them.
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of questionnaires.
- Be able to apply your understanding of questionnaires to the study of education.

Getting Started (page 116)

When you have completed the questionnaire (A1 to A4), write your answers to B1 to B4 and C here.

B1.

B2.

B3.

B4.

C. Positive points.

C. Negative points.

Define the following terms:

a. Closed-ended questions

b. Open-ended questions

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Advantages of questionnaires (pages 117-118)

Summarise the following advantages of questionnaires:

1. Practical advantages

2. Reliability

3. Hypothesis testing

4. Detachment and objectivity

5. Representativeness

6. Ethical issues

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Disadvantages of questionnaires (pages 118-119)

Summarise the following disadvantages of questionnaires:

1. Practical problems

2. Low response rate

3. Inflexibility

4. Questionnaires as snapshots

5. Detachment

6. Lying, forgetting and 'right answerism'

7. Imposing the researcher's meanings

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Analysis and evaluation (page 118)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

Box 18 Positivism, interpretivism and questionnaires (page 119)

1. Give three reasons why positivists might favour questionnaires.

2. Give two reasons why interpretivists might reject the use of questionnaires.

Analysis and evaluation (page 119)

Write your answers here.

QuickCheck Questions (page 120)

Write your answers below.

1.

2.

3.

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4.

5.

6.

7.

Now answer the Questions to try on page 120 of your textbook.

Methods in context - using questionnaires to investigate education (pages 121-123)

Summarise the strengths and limitations of using questionnaires to study education. Use the headings below. *Continue on a separate sheet of paper if necessary*.

a. Operationalisation of concepts

b. Samples and sampling frames

c. Access and response rate

d. Practical issues

e. Anonymity and detachment

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Analysis and evaluation (page 122)

Write your answer here.

Activity: Research *What factors affect students' decisions about university?* (page 122)

Write a summary of your research here.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

Now answer the Question to try on page 123 of your textbook.

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TOPIC 5 Interviews

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Understand the differences between structured and unstructured interviews.
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of the different types of interview.
- Be able to apply your understanding of interviews to the study of education.

Getting Started (page 124)

Write your answers to the Getting Started activity here.

1a.

1b.

2.

Types of interview (page 125)

Describe the following types of interview:

a. Structured or formal interviews

b. Unstructured or informal interviews

c. Semi-structured interviews

d. Group interviews

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Box 19 Group interviews (page 125)

1. Why might group interviews be likely to produce valid data?

2. Why might group interviews be unlikely to produce reliable data?

Analysis and evaluation (page 125)

Write your answers here.

1a.

1b.

2.

Structured interviews (pages 126-127)

Using the blue headings on pages 126, complete the table below to show strengths and limitations of structured interviews.

	Strengths	Limitations
Practical issues		
Response rate		

1. Explain why structured interviews are seen as producing reliable data.

2. Explain why critics see structured interviews as lacking validity.

3. What problems are caused by structured interviews being inflexible?

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4. State three feminist criticisms of survey methods such as structured interviews.

a.

b.

c.

Box 20 Using structured interviews (page 126)

Why would interviews such as the ones described in Box 20 be relatively quick to complete?

Unstructured interviews (pages 127-129)

Advantages of unstructured interviews (page 127-128)

Summarise the following advantages of unstructured interviews:

a. Rapport and sensitivity

b. The interviewee's view

c. Checking understanding

d. Flexibility

e. Exploring unfamiliar topics

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Analysis and evaluation (page 128)

Write your answers here.

Disadvantages of unstructured interviews (pages 128-129)

Summarise the following disadvantages of unstructured interviews:

a. Practical problems

b. Representativeness

c. Reliability

d. Quantification

e. Validity

Activity: Research *Comparing structured and unstructured interviews* (page 129)

Complete the following table:

	Structured interviews	Unstructured interviews
Practical advantages		
How representative? Give reasons.		
How valid? Give reasons.		

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How reliable? Give reasons.		
Practical disadvantages		

Box 21 Positivism, interpretivism and interviews (page 129)

1. Give three reasons why positivists might favour structured interviews.

2. Give two reasons why interpretivists might favour unstructured interviews.

The interview as a social interaction (pages 129-130)

Explain how the following factors may affect an interview:

a. Interview bias

b. Artificiality

c. Status and power inequalities

d. Cultural differences

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e. The social desirability effect

f. Ethical issues

Application (page 130)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

Improving the validity of interviews (page 130)

Explain how the following researchers improved the validity of their interviews:

a. Kinsey (1953)

b. Becker (1971)

c. Nazroo (1997)

Activity: Discussion *Age, ethnicity and interviewing* (page 130)

Write your summary here.

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QuickCheck Questions (page 131)

Write your answers below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Now answer the Questions to try on page 131 of your textbook.

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Practical issues (pages 132-133)

1. List some of the practical issues when using interviews to research young people in education.

2. What practical problems might a sociologist face when trying to interview:

a. Teachers?

b. Parents?

Application (page 132)

Write your answer here.

Reliability and validity (page 133)

1. Why are structured interviews likely to produce reliable data?

2. Why are structured interviews less likely to produce valid data?

Access and response rate (page 133)

1. List some of the problems of gaining access to pupils and teachers.

2. How might the researcher overcome issues of access?

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Analysis and evaluation (page 133)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

The interviewer as 'teacher in disguise' (page 133)

What might be the effects on the interviews if pupils see the researcher as a 'teacher in disguise'?

Improving the validity of interviews with pupils (page 134)

List the five ways in which Greene and Hogan say interviews with pupils might be improved.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

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Activity: Research *Researching sex education* (page 134)

Write your summary of your research here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Box 22 A group interview (page 134)

Using Box 22 and the text, make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of using group interviews with pupils.

Now answer the Question to try on page 135 of your textbook.

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TOPIC 6 Participant observation

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the different types of observational methods.
- Be able to explain the main stages in conducting a participant observation study.
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of overt and covert participant observation.
- Be able to apply your understanding of observational methods to the study of education.

Getting Started (page 136)

Write your answers to the Getting Started activity here.

1.

2.

3a.

3b.

3c.

3d.

4.

Types of observation (page 137)

1. Define:

a. Non-participation observation

b. Participation observation

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2. Explain the difference between overt observation and covert observation.

Analysis and evaluation (page 137)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

Conducting a participant observation study (pages 137-140)

Making contact (page 138)

How did the following sociologists made contact with the subjects of their study?

1. Ned Polsky

2. James Patrick

3. Eileen Fairhurst

Activity: Webquest *Black Like Me* (page 138)

Make notes here on your internet search. Use these to help you prepare for your discussion.

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The observer's role (page 138)

Why was the role that Whyte took a suitable one for his purposes?

Analysis and evaluation (page 138)

Write your answer here.

Staying in (page 138)

1. What problems does over-involvement cause for the participant observer?

2. In what ways did Punch over-identify with the police?

3. How might spending a long time with the group being observed adversely affect the research?

Getting out (page 139)

Identify two problems sociologists might face when leaving a participant observation.

1.

2.

Overt observation (page 139)

1. Outline four advantages of overt observation.

a.

b.

c.

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d.

2. Outline two disadvantages of overt observation.

a.

b.

Covert observation (page 139)

1. What is the main practical advantage of covert observation?

2. Outline four practical disadvantages of covert observation.

a.

b.

c.

d.

Ethical issues (page 140)

List the four ethical issues affecting covert observation.

Advantages of participant observation (pages 140-141)

1. Explain the following advantages of participant observation:

a. Validity

b. Insight

2. Why is participant observation a more flexible method than methods like questionnaires and structured interviews?

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3. Why might participant observation be the only method of studying certain groups?

Disadvantages of participant observation (pages 141-142)

Analysis and evaluation (page 141)

Write your answer here.

Disadvantages of participant observation (pages 141-142)

1. Suggest reasons why the researcher's personal characteristics might affect the success of the observation.

2. Suggest two reasons why participant observation studies may not use representative samples.

3. Why may the data from participant observation studies not be reliable?

4. Give three reasons why participant observation studies may lack objectivity.

5. Why do positivists argue that findings from participant observation studies may not be valid?

6. Why do structural sociologists argue that participant observation may be inadequate?

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Activity: Research *The rules of the game* (page 142)

1. Make your notes on your observation here.

2. List your difficulties here and your reasons why you would choose participant or non-participant observation.

QuickCheck Questions (page 143)

Write your answers to the questions here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now answer the Questions to try on page 143 of your textbook.

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6.

7.

8.

Methods in context - using observation to investigate education (pages 144-147)

Structured observation (page 144)

1. Give two reasons why positivists favour structured observation when studying education.

a.

b.

2. Give one reason why interpretivists criticise structured observation as a means of studying education.

Box 24 Flanders interaction analysis categories (page 144)

Make a list of the problems a researcher might face in using Flanders' system when studying classroom interaction.

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Activity: Research *Classroom observation: structured or unstructured?* (page 144)

Write your summary of your research here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Unstructured observation (pages 144-146)

Using the results from your Research Activity and the information in the text, summarise the strengths and limitations of using unstructured observation to study education. *Continue on a separate sheet of paper if necessary.*

1. Practical issues

2. Ethical issues

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3. Validity

4. The Hawthorn effect

5. Representatives

6. Reliability

Application (page 146)

Write your answers here.

1a.

1b.

1c.

1d.

1e.

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1f.

2a.

2b.

Box 25 Longitudinal studies (page 146)

Give two advantages and two disadvantages of longitudinal studies:

Advantage 1

Advantage 2

Disadvantage 1

Disadvantage 2

Now answer the Question to try on page 147 of your textbook.

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TOPIC 7 Secondary Sources

Learning Objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the different types of secondary data that sociologists use.
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of official statistics and documents.
- Be able to apply your understanding of documents and official statistics to the study of education.

Getting Started (page 148)

Write your answers to the Getting Started activity here.

1.

2.

3.

Official statistics (page 149-152)

Explain the difference between registration and official surveys as ways of collecting official statistics.

Analysis and evaluation (page 149)

Write your answers here.

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Practical issues (page 150)

1. State three practical advantages of official statistics.

a.

b.

c.

2. State three practical disadvantages of official statistics.

a.

b.

c.

Representativeness (page 150)

State one reason why official statistics are often highly representative.

Reliability (page 150)

Why are official statistics likely to be reliable?

Box 26 Positivism, interpretivism and official statistics (page 150)

1. Give four reasons why positivists might favour using official statistics in their research.

a.

b.

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c.

d.

2. Why do interpretivists reject the use of official statistics in sociological research?

Validity: the 'dark figure' (page 151)

Define the following terms:

a. Hard statistics

b. Soft statistics

Application (page 151)

Write your answers here.

1.

2.

3.

Figure 3.3 Crime statistics - the official view (page 151)

Given the process by which official crime statistics are constructed, explain why they may not be valid.

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Activity: Research *Comparing perspectives on official statistics* (page 152)

Complete the table below to summarise how each of these theoretical perspectives views official statistics.

Perspective	Facts, constructs or ideology	Explanation
Positivists		
Interpretivists		
Marxists		

Documents (pages 152-154)

Give a brief outline and an example of the following types of documents:

a. Public documents

b. Personal documents

c. Historical documents

Assessing documents (pages 153-154)

Summarise Scott's four criteria for assessing documents:

1. Authenticity

2. Credibility

3. Representativeness

4. Meaning

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Box 27 Positivism, interpretivism and documents (page 153)

1. Give two reasons why interpretivists might choose to use documents in their research.

2. Give three reasons why positivists might reject their use.

Activity: Discussion *Using documents to study childhood* (page 154)

Write your summary here.

Advantages of documents (page 154)

Identify four advantages of using documents in sociological research:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Activity: Research *How do newspapers report crime* (page 154)

Write your summary of your research here.

1.

2.

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QuickCheck Questions (page 155)

Write your answers below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Now answer the Questions to try on page 155 of your textbook.

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Using official statistics to investigate education (pages 156-157)

Using the headings below, summarise the strengths and limitations of using official statistics to investigate education.

a. Practical issues

b. Representativeness

c. Reliability

d. Validity

Activity: Research *Does absence cause underachievement* (page 157)

Complete your graph on graph paper. Give your answers to the questions here.

1.

2.

3.

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Using documents to investigate education (page 157-158)

Using the headings below, summarise the strengths and limitations of using documents to investigate education.

a. Practical issues

b. Ethical issues

c. Representativeness

d. Reliability

e. Validity

Analysis and evaluation (page 158)

Write your answers here.

(a)

(b)

Now answer the Question to try on page 159 of your textbook.

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