

# AS Level Sociology (9699)

## Unit Two: Sociological Methods

### Recommended Prior Knowledge

Knowledge of the main sociological perspectives, acquired in unit one, will prove particularly useful in studying unit two.

### Context

An understanding of the methods used in sociological research will help students evaluate the reliability and validity of the various studies they will encounter in units three to nine. Unit two should also be used to foster a deeper understanding of the main sociological theories that were introduced in unit one.

### Outline

Unit two examines the basic concepts and issues in research design and evaluation. The main study aim is to promote awareness of the grounds on which it is appropriate for sociologists to claim that their research findings are truthful and worthwhile.

AO	Learning outcomes	Suggested Teaching activities	Learning resources
2.1	<p>Methods of Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the respective strengths and limitations of primary and secondary data.</li> <li>• Describe and evaluate the different research methods used in sociological research.</li> <li>• Recognise the stages of research design.</li> </ul>	<p>Begin the work for this unit by using examples to distinguish between primary and secondary data and between quantitative and qualitative data.</p> <p>Provide a summary of the main research methods used in sociological research.</p> <p>Basing the lesson on a classic sociological study, identify the stages of research design, as outlined in the syllabus document.</p> <p><b>Class activity</b></p> <p>Provide a list of research topics. Working alone, or in small groups, ask members of the class to choose a topic and prepare a research strategy covering all stages of research design. Discuss the research strategies with the class and reach conclusions about the</p>	<p>Barnard, A. et al, pp 54-61 distinguishes between primary and secondary data and describes the main sociological research methods.</p> <p>Barnard, A. et al, pp61-62 summarises the stages in research design.</p> <p>For a useful student guide to research methods, see: <a href="http://www.hartland64.freereserve.co.uk/sociology">www.hartland64.freereserve.co.uk/sociology</a></p>

strengths and limitations of each design.

A good reference resource on research methods is provided at: [www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.htm](http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.htm)

## 2.2 Theory and Methods

- Understanding of the positivist and anti-positivist approaches to sociological research.
- Discuss the theoretical, practical and ethical considerations that influence choice of topic, methods and the conduct of research.
- Evaluate research designs using concepts such as validity, reliability and objectivity.
- Assess the usefulness of triangulation and methodological pluralism.

Describe the factors that influence choice of research design, paying particular attention to the relationship between theory and methods. Cover both the positivist and anti-positivist approaches.

Set exercises that invite the students to use the concepts of validity, reliability, objectivity and representativeness in evaluating the strengths and limitations of different sources of data and research methods.

Conclude the unit by discussing situations in which triangulation and methodological pluralism might be useful in sociological research.

### **Class activity**

Invite the students to read about a number of sociological studies and to analyse the factors that influenced the choice of topic and research methods in each case. Consider the students' findings in a class discussion.

Barnard, A. et al, pp62-64 reflects on the links between theory and methods.

Barnard, A. et al, pp64-65 examines the concepts of validity, reliability, objectivity and representativeness.

Barnard, A. et al, pp65-66 provides a useful summary of triangulation and methodological pluralism.

Study notes on different research approaches can be accessed at: [www.teaching.sociology.ul.ie](http://www.teaching.sociology.ul.ie)

Search 'research methods' at [www.sociology.org.uk](http://www.sociology.org.uk) for a range of helpful student resources.

The Classic Collection video, Theory and Methods, provides an excellent introduction to the topic.