### FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE OF METHODS

#### PRATICAL ISSUES

| Time and money | - Different methods require different amounts of time & money / this may influence the sociologist’s choice.  
|                | - E.g. large-scale surveys may employ dozens of interviewers & data-inputting staff / cost a great deal of money.  
|                | - A small-scale project involving a lone researcher using participant observation may be cheaper to carry out.  
|                | - But can take several years to complete. |
| Requirements of funding bodies | - Research institutes, businesses and other organisations that provide funding for research may require results to be in a particular form.  
|                | - E.g. a government department funding research into educational achievement may have targets for pass rates.  
|                | - So require quantitative data to see whether these targets are being achieved.  
|                | - This means the sociologist will have to use a method capable of producing such data, like questionnaires or structured interviews. |
| Personal skills and characteristics | - Each sociologist possesses different personal skills / this may affect their ability to use different methods.  
|                | - E.g. participant observation requires ability to mix easily with others as well as good powers of observation & recall.  
|                | - Depth interviews need ability to establish a rapport (relationship of empathy and trust) with the interviewee.  
|                | - Not all sociologists have these qualities and so some may have difficulty using these methods. |
3.2: Education: The Research Context

- Sociologists study issues in education like classroom interaction, pupil subcultures, teacher labelling, parental choice etc.
- In studying educational issues like these, sociologists need to be aware of the particular characteristics of education, since these will affect their choice of research method and its effectiveness.

E.g.

• In studying pupil subcultures, there might be problems using covert participant observation, simply because it would prove hard for a researcher to pass themselves off as a pupil.
• Similarly, in studying parental attitudes to schooling, there may be difficulties in using written questionnaires to discover opinions of parents who are illiterate.

RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS

RESEARCHING PUPILS

In education, many people sociologists study are children & young people – pupils & students.

Hill: there are 3 differences between studying young people and studying adults:

• Power and status
• Ability and understanding
• Vulnerability

- Children and young people generally have less power and status than adults.
- This makes it difficult for them to state their attitudes and views openly, especially if they challenge those of adults.
### Power and status

- This is particularly true of schools, because they're hierarchical institutions that give teachers higher status and power over pupils.
- Teachers may use this power to influence which pupils are selected for research.
- E.g. to promote a good image of themselves or the school.

- Formal research methods like structured interviews or questionnaires often reinforce power differences.
- This is because it's the researcher and not the young person who determines what questions are asked / how answers should be formulated.

- Sociologists thus need to consider how they can overcome power & status differences between adult researchers and young participants.
  E.g. group interviews rather than formal one-on-one interviews may be a good way of doing this.
- However, it’s likely that whatever research methods are used, some power and status differences between researchers & pupils will remain.

- Pupils' attitudes towards the power and status differences between themselves are also likely affect how they relate to the researcher.
- E.g. pupils who resent the power of teachers over them may be less likely to cooperate with research.
- However, such pupils may feel empowered by participating in the research and express their true feelings about school.
| Gatekeepers | \textbf{Meighan & Harber}: heads sometimes view research negatively.  
E.g. heads’ reactions to a research project that Meighan wanted to carry out on consulting pupils about teaching including the views:  
\begin{itemize}  
\item It’s dangerous to involve pupils in commenting on their teachers.  
\item Discipline would be adversely affected.  
\item It would be bad for classroom relationships.  
\item Children aren’t competent to judge teachers.  
\end{itemize}  
- Some situations and school setting may be ‘off limits’ to a research – e.g. head teachers’ interviews with parents.  
- \textbf{Beynon & Atkinson}: note that gatekeepers like heads often steer the researcher away from sensitive situations.  
- Such as classes where the teacher has poor classroom control. |
|---|---|
| School organisation | Schools are formal institutions with rules and hierarchies.  
- Researchers may be seen as part of the hierarchy.  
- E.g. students may see them as teachers, while teachers may see them as inspectors.  
- In schools where there is conflict, e.g. between students & teachers, researchers may even be seen as the enemy.  
- Unlike most organisations in today’s society, many schools are single-sex.  
- This may pose problems where the researcher is of a different gender from the pupils. |
- Their class, gender and ethnicity may all affect how willing/able they are to participate in research.

- E.g. pro-school middle-class parents may be more likely than working-class parents to return questionnaires about their children’s education.
- This will make research findings unrepresentative.

- Parental permission is required for many forms of research with pupils.
- How likely parents are to give their permission may depend on the sensitivity of the research issue / whether they can see their children benefitting from being involved.
- In general, the more sensitive an issue appears to be for parents, the less likely they are to consent to their children participating in research.

- Parents may engage in impression management, presenting themselves to researchers in a positive light by exaggerating their involvement in their children’s education.
- E.g. they may lie about whether they attend parents’ evenings or how often they read to their children.
- This will result in invalid data being gathered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access to parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Many sociologists see parents as playing a vital role in children’s education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- But most parent-child interaction takes place in the home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- As a private setting often closed to researchers, this presents difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- E.g. while classroom interactions between teachers and pupils can often be observed easily, there are few opportunities to observe whether parents help children with their homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unlike most other important groups within education, parents are unusual in that they’re mostly physically located outside the school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Reliability** | • Rosenthal & Jacobson's research design was relatively simple / so easy to repeat.  
  • Within 5 years of the original study, it had been repeated hundreds of times.  
  • But due to differences between school classes (e.g. in terms of age, teaching styles etc.) it's unlikely the original could be replicated exactly. |
| **Validity** | • Rosenthal & Jacobson: teachers' expectations were passed on through differences in interactions with pupils.  
  • But the researchers didn't carry out any observation of classroom interaction so they had no data to support this claim.  
  • Later studies that used observation, like Claiborn, found no evidence of teacher expectations being passed on through classroom interaction. |
| **Broader focus** | • But Rosenthal & Jacobson looked at the whole labelling process from teacher expectations through to their effect on pupils.  
  • (Rather than just examining elements in isolation).  
  • Their study was also longitudinal, which allowed them to identify trends over time. |
### 3. Hypothesis testing

- Questionnaires are esp. useful for testing hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships between different variables.
- E.g. educational achievement / analysis of respondents’ answers could show whether there’s a correlation between children’s achievement levels and family size.
- We might find low achievers come from large families.
- Then we can make statements about possible causes of low achievement
- And predictions about which children are most likely to underachieve.
- As questionnaires enable us to identify possible causes, they’re very attractive to positivist sociologists.
- They take a scientific approach and seek to discover laws of cause and effect.

### 4. Detachment and objectivity

- Positivists also favour questionnaires as they’re a detached and objective (unbiased) method.
  - The sociologists’ personal involvement with their respondents is kept to a minimum.
  - E.g. postal questionnaires are completed at a distance and involve little or no personal contact with respondents.
  - So positivists see them as a good way of maintaining detachment and objectivity.

### 5. Representativeness

- As questionnaires can collect information from a large number of people, the results are more likely to be representative of the wider population.
- Much more than other methods that only study small numbers of people.
- Researchers who use questionnaires often pay more attention to need to obtain a representative sample.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Ethical issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- So the findings of questionnaires are more likely to allow us to make accurate generalisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Questionnaires pose fewer ethical problems than most other research methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Although questionnaires may ask intrusive or sensitive questions, respondents are generally under no obligation to answer them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Still, researchers should gain respondents' informed consent / guarantee their anonymity / make it clear they have a right not to answer any questions they don't wish to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISADVANTAGES OF QUESTIONNAIRES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Practical problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The data from questionnaires tend to be limited and superficial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- This is since they need to be brief, as most respondents are unlikely to complete / return a long, time-consuming questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- This limits the amount of information that can be gathered from each respondent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Although questionnaires are a cheap means of gathering data, you may need to offer incentives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- E.g. entry into a prize draw - to persuade respondents to complete the form. This adds to the cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With postal and online questionnaires, there are 2 additional problems:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Whether the potential respondent has actually received the questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Whether a returned questionnaire was actually completed by the person to whom it was addressed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5. Inflexibility

- Like self-completed questionnaires, structured interviews suffer from inflexibility (from having to draw up the questions in advance).

- The researcher’s already decided what’s important – yet this may not coincide with what the interviewee thinks is important.

- So the findings may lack validity as they don’t reflect the interviewee’s concerns and priorities.

- Establishing questions beforehand & sticking to them rigidly makes it impossible to pursue any leads that emerge in the interviews’ course.

- This loses valuable insights.

- Also like questionnaires, structured interviews are just snapshots taken at a moment in time.

- They fail to capture the following, dynamic nature of social life – unlike participant observation.

### 6. Feminist criticisms

- Feminist survey methods like questionnaires and structured interviews are patriarchal.

- They give a distorted, invalid picture of women’s experience.

She argues:

- The researcher, not the female interviewee, is in control of the interview / decides the line of questioning to be followed. This mirrors women’s subordination in wider society.

- Survey methods treat women as isolated individuals rather than seeing them in the
context of the power relationships that oppress them.

- Surveys impose the researcher’s categories on women, making it hard for them to express their experiences of oppression. Thus concealing the unequal power relationships between the sexes.

These feminist criticisms are similar to those put forward by interpretivist sociologists.

They argue structured interviews fail to reveal how the interviewee sees their situation.

Graham argues sociologists need to use methods that allow the researcher to understand women’s behaviour, attitudes & meanings.

She thus advocates the use of direct observation instead of structured interviews.

Other feminists favour unstructured interviews. These enable the researcher to build a more equal / collaborative relationship on trust, empathy & support.

### UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

A structured interview follows a standardised format / in an unstructured interview the interviewer has complete freedom to vary the interview.

### ADVANTAGES OF UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

While structured interviews are criticised for their lack of validity, unstructured interviews are seen as a way to gather valid data.
This enables researchers to get a deeper understanding of the interviewee’s world.

1. Rapport and sensitivity

- The informality of unstructured interviews allows the interviewer to develop a rapport (relationship of trust & understanding) with the interviewee.

- This is more likely to put the interviewee at ease & encourage them to open up than a formal structured interview.

- E.g. Labov: used a formal interview technique to study the language of Black American children.

- Found they appeared to be tongue-tied & 'linguistically deprived'.

- Adopting a more relaxed, informal style (the interviewer sitting on the floor, the child allowed to have a friend present) brought a different response.

- The children, surprisingly, spoke freely, showing they were competent speakers.

- Unstructured interviews are esp. useful when researching sensitive topics.

- E.g. Dobash & Dobash: used them to study domestic violence.

- The empathy/encouragement of the interviewer helps the interviewee to feel comfortable discussing hard or personal subjects like abuse.

2. The interviewee’s view

- As there’s no set questions, unstructured interviews allow the interviewee more opportunity to speak about those things they think are important.

- This contrasts the structured interview, where the researcher decides in advance what questions are worth asking.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unstructured interviews can often take an hour or more to conduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Given time constraints most teachers work under, interviews would have to take place outside school hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If the interviews are conducted during school time, there are likely to be interruptions and other distractions common in a busy school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents also have busy work/parenting schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May only cooperate in lengthy interviews if they can see some benefit to their children’s education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- For young children esp., there’s the ethical issue that they may be unsettled by strange situations like interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- So researchers need to take particular care that the interview doesn’t distress them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability and validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Structured interviews produce reliable data as they’re standardised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Each interview conducted in precisely the same way with the same questions, tone of voice etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- But structured interviews may not produce valid data, since young people are unlikely to respond favourably to such a formal style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perhaps as it makes the interviewer appear too much like a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bentley: instead began each interview by showing them an image of her being silly with her daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- During the interview, she maintained a relaxed atmosphere by nodding, smiling &amp; making eye contact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6: Participant Observation

- One problem of using survey methods like interviews/questionnaires to study people is what they say they do & what they actually do may be very different.
- E.g. in interviews, people may conceal information or lie about their real behaviour to please the interviewer, keep dignity or create a better impression of themselves.

- One way to overcome this problem is to see for ourselves what people do by observing them in their normal everyday environment.
- Rather than questioning them in an artificial interview situation.
- By using observational methods rather than questioning people, we might get a truer, more valid picture of social reality.

**TYPES OF OBSERVATION**

- **Non-participant observation**
  The researcher simply observes the group or event without taking part in it. E.g. they may use a two-way mirror to observe children playing.

- **Participant observation**
  The researcher actually takes part in an event or the everyday life of the group while observing it.

- **Overt observation**
  The researcher makes their true identity and purpose known to those being studied.
  The sociologist is open about what they’re doing.

- **Covert observation**
  The study is carried out ‘under cover’.
  The researcher’s real identity and purpose are kept concealed from the group being studied.
  The researcher takes on a false identity and role, usually posing as a genuine member of the group.
• Participation in the group gives the researcher first hand insight into social actors' meanings and behaviour – esp. if the observation is carried out covertly.

Positivists favour structured non-participant observation as it achieves their main goals of reliability, generalisability and representativeness.

• Standardised behaviour categories produce reliable data as other researchers can replicate the observation.
• Pre-determined observational categories allow us to produce quantitative data, identify and measure behaviour patterns, and establish cause-and-effect relationships.
• Structured observation takes less time than unstructured observation, so a larger, more representative sample can be studied.

Interpretivists reject structured observation as it imposes the researcher's view of reality on those being observed, resulting in invalid data.

### DISADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

**SUMMARY**

1. Practical Disadvantages

   - It's very time-consuming. E.g. Whyte's study took him 4 years to complete.
   - The researcher needs to be trained to recognise aspects of a situation that are sociologically significant and worth further attention.
     - It can be personally stressful and demanding, esp. if covert.
     - It requires observational and interpersonal skills that not everyone possesses.
     - Personal characteristics like age, gender or ethnicity may restrict what groups can be studied.
     - Many groups may not wish to be studied in this way / some have the power to make access hard.
     This is one reason why participant observation often focuses on relatively powerless groups who are less able to resist being studied, like petty criminals.
- But structural sociologists like Marxists and functionalists see this as inadequate.
- They argue as it focuses on ‘micro’ level of actors’ meanings, participant observation often ignores wider structural forces that shape behaviour.
- In the structuralist view, seeing things only through the actors’ eyes will never give us the complete picture.
- E.g. if the actors are unaware of the structural forces shaping their behaviour, then their own account of their lives, revealed through participant observation, will give us only a partial view at best.

**SUMMARY**

- Participant observation involves joining in with a group to gain insight.
- It can be overt or covert.
- Research goes through 3 phases: getting in, staying in and getting out.
- Covert PO may produce more valid data, but is ethically questionable and faces practical problems of maintaining one’s cover.
- Interpretivists claim PO produces valid data.
- But positivists argue it’s unreliable, unrepresentative and lacks objectivity.
- They prefer **structured observation**, which is usually non-participant and collects quantitative data.
**METHODS IN CONTEXT**

*(using observation to investigate education)*

The main use of observational techniques in the study of education is to investigate classroom interaction and the behaviour, attitudes and values of teachers & pupils.

Sociologists are interested in a range of possible classroom interaction issues. These include:

- Gender and classroom behaviour
- Teacher expectations and labelling
- Speech codes in the classroom
- Pupil subcultures
- Teacher and pupil racism
- The hidden curriculum

### STRUCTURED OBSERVATION

- At one extreme are highly structured methods using pre-categorised observational schedules.
- Positivists prefer these methods as they can identify and make quantitative measurements of behaviour patterns.
- These methods are usually non-participant.

**Practical issues**

- One example of the structured observational schedules favoured by positivists is the Flanders system of interaction analysis categories (FIAC).
- This is used to measure pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher interaction quantitatively.
- The observer uses a standard chart to record interactions at three-second intervals, placing each observation in 1 of 10 pre-defined behaviour categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Hawthorne Effect</th>
<th>- This makes it hard for researchers to be certain they understand pupils meanings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It’s hard to carry out covert observation of educational settings, esp. classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There are few 'cover' roles the researcher can adopt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They stand out being much older than pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This means most classroom observation has to be overt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- But this makes it hard to avoid the Hawthorne Effect, where the presence of the researcher influences the behaviour of those being observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- E.g. King tried to blend into the background in an infant school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- He initially spent short periods of time in the classroom so children became familiar with his presence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- To not be seen as a teacher, he avoided eye contact and politely refused their requests for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- To be unobtrusive, he even used the classroom’s Wendy House as a ‘hide’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This shows how hard it is for an adult observer to reduce the effect of their presence on pupils’ behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Children’s awareness of King’s presence may have changed their normal behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- So undermined the validity of his observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representativeness</td>
<td>- The scale of the education system is vast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There are around 4,000 secondary and over 30,000 primary schools in England and Wales, as well as over 350 colleges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The government collects official statistics to use in policy-making. E.g. statistics on births help the government to plan the number of school places for the future. Ofsted & the Department for Education use statistics on things like exam results to monitor the effectiveness of schools and colleges.

There are 2 ways of collecting official statistics:

- **Registration** - e.g. the law requires parents to register births.
- **Official surveys** - like the Census or the General Household Survey.

In addition to official statistics from the government, organisations & groups like trade unions, charities, businesses & churches also produce statistics. E.g. the educational pressure group, the National Grammar Schools Association, produces statistics on the comparative performance of grammar and non-selective schools.

Both the advantages and the disadvantages of official statistics stem largely from them being secondary data. They're not collected by sociologists but by official agencies for their own particular purposes. These may not always be the same as those of the sociologist.

**QUANTITATIVE**: Official statistics / Non-official statistics / Existing quantitative sociological research

**QUALITATIVE**: Historical documents / Personal documents / Public documents / Existing qualitative sociological research

| 1. Practical issues | Advantages: Official statistics have practical advantages. ✓ They are a free source of huge amounts of data. |
These are first-person accounts of social events and personal experiences / generally include writer’s feeling & attitudes.

E.g. Thomas & Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* = a study of migration and social change.

As interactionists, they were interested in people’s personal experiences of these events.

They used personal documents to reveal the meanings individuals gave to their experience of migration.

The documents included 764 letters bought after an advertisement in a Polish newspaper in Chicago & several autobiographies.

Thomas & Znaniecki: used public documents like newspaper articles on rural Polish social work records.

With these records, they could explore the experience of social change of some who migrated from rural Poland to the USA in early 20th Century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Historical documents</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A historical document’s a personal or public document created in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If we want to study the past, historical documents are usually the only source of information. (Although in the recent past, there may be people still alive who can be questioned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study of families and households shows types of historical documents used:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Laslett used parish records in his study of family structure in pre-industrial England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Anderson used parliamentary reports on child labour, as well as statistical material from 1851 Census, to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Study changes in family structure in 19th Century Preston.  
|  
| • Aries: used child-rearing manuals and paintings of children in his study of rise of modern notion of childhood.  

### ASSESSING DOCUMENTS

- **Scott**: when assessing documentary sources, the general principles are the same as those for any other sociological evidence.
- Suggests 4 criteria for evaluating documents:

| **1. Authenticity** | Whether the document is what it claims to be.  
|  | Where there are any missing pages. If it’s a copy, whether it’s free from errors.  
|  | Who wrote the document  
|  | E.g. the so-called ‘Hitler Diaries’ were later proven to be fake.  

| **2. Credibility** | Whether the document’s believable.  
|  | Whether the author’s sincere  
|  | Politicians may write diaries intended for publication that inflate their own importance.  
|  | Trawicki & Znaniecki’s Polish immigrants may had lied in their letters home about how good life in the USA was.  
|  | To justify their decision to emigrate.  
|  | Whether the document’s accurate.  
|  | E.g. was the account of a riot written soon after the event, or years later?  
|  | **Stein**: documents on the internet are often not checked for accuracy before publication.  

| **3. Representativeness** | Whether the evidence in the document is typical.  
|  | If we can’t answer this question, we can’t know if it’s safe to generalise from it:  

---

Preview from Notesale.co.uk

Page 123 of 135
✓ Sometimes documents are the only source of information, e.g. in studying the past.
✓ By providing another source of data, documents can reject/support results obtained by primary methods.
✓ They're a cheap source of data, as someone else has already gathered information.
✓ So using existing documents saves the sociologist time.

**Positivism, interpretivism and documents**

**Interpretivists** often favour documents as they achieve the main interpretivist goal of validity.

- They're not usually written with research in mind and can thus be an authentic statement of their author’s views.
- They provide qualitative data that gives us insight into the author’s worldview and meanings.

**Positivists** often reject documents as they fail to achieve the main positivist goals of reliability, generalisability and representativeness.

- They're often unstandardized and unreliable, e.g. every person’s diary is unique.
  This also makes it hard to draw generalisations from them.
- They're often unrepresentative; e.g. only literate groups can write diaries and letters.
- In interpreting documents, researchers may impose their own meanings on them.

But positivists sometimes carry out content analysis on documents to produce quantitative data from them.

**CONTENT ANALYSIS**

- Content analysis is a method for dealing systematically with the contents of documents.
- It's best known for use in analysing documents produced by the mass media, like TV news bulletins or advertisements.
Schools may manipulate their attendance figures by redefining poor attenders as being on study leave or additional work experience.

- They may be tempted to do this as in an education market there’s pressure on schools to present themselves in the best possible light.
- To maintain their funding and parental support.
- But this deliberate distorting of attendance figures undermines the validity of educational statistics.

**USING DOCUMENTS TO INVESTIGATE EDUCATION**

Schools, colleges, local authorities and the Department for Education generate a range of public documents.

As pupils produce large amounts of paper-based work, there’s opportunity for the researcher to use personal educational documents.

Documents cover educational issues sociologists are interested in, like:

- Ethnic, class & gender differences in achievement
- The curriculum
- Gender stereotyping in school books
- Racist incidents in schools
- Special educational needs

**Practical issues**

- Public documents on education are often easily accessible.
- Government policies emphasise parental choice, so schools make a large amount of information available to the public, which researchers may then use.

- E.g. *Gillborn* (in his study of racism & schooling) could access a range of school documents.
- Inc. school policy statements, local authority guidelines on anti-racism & minutes of staff meetings / working parties.