3.3 The research proposal

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS research proposal • population of interest • research question • thematic analysis • pilot study

Objective

Build the skills to plan the **research proposal** (internal assessment): a focused research question and population, a method chosen from the class practicals, sampling, procedure, ethics, and a discussion of the plan's strengths and limits, with every choice argued.

You must be able to:

- write a focused research question with a clear population
- choose and justify a method (experiment, interview or focus group, observation, questionnaire)
- choose and justify a sampling technique and sample size
- plan ethical procedures for the population
- discuss the plan with the concepts and suggest improvements

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ What the proposal is

A plan for a study of 24 marks. You choose a topic and a **population of interest** (for example, international students in their first year in China), plan a study with one of the four class-practical methods, and **argue for every choice**. You do not collect data.

■ Building the plan

part	ask yourself	example
research question	is it focused, with a population and something you can study?	How do first-year international students in Ningbo experience making friends?
method	why does this method fit the question better than the others?	semi-structured interviews, because the question is about experience and needs rich data
sample	who, how many, how recruited, and why?	purposive sample of eight students through the university's international office
procedure	what happens, step by step, so someone else could repeat it?	interview guide, 30 minutes, recorded, transcribed, thematic analysis
ethics	consent, withdrawal, harm, confidentiality: what exactly will you do?	consent forms, right to withdraw, no names, counselling information
discussion	what are the plan's limits, and how could they be reduced?	the researcher's views could shape questions (bias): a second researcher codes the transcripts; eight students in one city may not transfer

Answer shape for each choice: the choice → why it suits the question and population → a limit → how you reduce it.

Common errors: a question too broad to study ("Why are people stressed?"); a method chosen without reasons; ethics written as a list with no detail for this population.

2 Practice

2.1 Rewrite this research question so that it is focused: "Why are people stressed?" [2]



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2.2 For the question "Does background noise affect how many maths problems Year 10 students solve in 10 minutes?", choose a method and justify your choice. [3]





2.3 A student wants to study how first-year international students in Ningbo experience making friends. Choose a sampling technique and justify it. [3]



2.4 Plan the ethical procedures for interviewing 16-year-olds about loneliness. [4]



2.5 A proposal plans to interview only the researcher's own friends. Identify **one** problem with this and suggest an improvement. [3]



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3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Plan a research proposal on this topic: **how students at international schools in China use social media to keep in touch with family abroad**.

(a) Write a focused research question with a population. [2]



(b) Choose a method and justify it. [4]

(c) Describe your sample and procedure. [4]

(d) Discuss **one** limitation of your plan with reference to the concept of **bias**, and how you would reduce it. [5]