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]

Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

names a population, e.g. Year 12 boarding students in one school; names one aspect that can be studied, e.g. how they experience stress in the week before mock exams

2.2

an experiment; the question asks about the effect of one variable (noise) on another (problems solved), so the IV must be changed and other variables controlled; it gives numbers that can be compared between conditions / it can show cause

2.3

purposive sampling (snowball also accepted with reasons); the study needs people with a particular experience: international, first year, in Ningbo; a limit: the people chosen through one office may be more outgoing, so include students from several courses / countries

2.4

informed consent from the students (and parents if the school requires it), with the aim and the topic explained; the right to withdraw at any time, including their data; protection from harm: a gentle interview guide, stop if upset, information about the school counsellor; confidentiality: no names, recordings stored securely and deleted after analysis

2.5

friends may give answers they think the researcher wants (participant bias) / are similar to each other, so findings may not transfer; improvement: recruit through a teacher or notice, from several classes, people the researcher does not know well

3.1

(a) focused and studiable, e.g. “How do Year 12 students at one international school in Shanghai whose parents live abroad use social media to stay close to their families?”

(b) semi-structured interviews (or another justified method); the question is about experience and meaning, so rich, detailed data are needed; follow-up questions let students explain how and why they use each app; a questionnaire would give counts but miss feelings

(c) purposive sample of, e.g., six to eight students whose parents live abroad, recruited through the school counsellor; informed consent, right to withdraw, no names; an interview guide with open questions, about 20 to 30 minutes, recorded; transcripts coded for themes by two researchers

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(d) award up to [5]: a clear limitation linked to bias, e.g. researcher bias: the researcher’s own experience of living away from family may shape the questions and the themes found; reduction: a pilot interview, an interview guide checked by a teacher, and a second researcher coding the transcripts; or participant bias: students may present their family relationships positively; reduce with rapport, confidentiality and non-judgemental questions