Applied Social Research – Study Notes – Sample

What is Qualitative Research?
How Could we Collect and Analyse this Information (Qualitative Research)
- Data Collection
    - Focus groups
    - Surveys
    - Questionnaires
    - Interviews (structured, semi-structured, unstructured)
    - Reviewing secondary data (e.g. message boards)
    - Observations
- Data Analysis
    - Thematic analysis (recurring themes, patterns) (focus groups)
    - Take notes. Comparing, seeing differences/similarities, trends
        - Similar to thematic, but more engagement with one another (observation)
    - Tables, graphs. Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
    - Could look for themes or key words and count them (content analysis) (reviewing secondary data)

Strengths and weaknesses of these methods:
- **Interviews –** <u>weakness</u>: time. <u>Strength</u>: gets a rich story. Someone impartial should conduct interviews as they would be unbiased
- **Focus groups** – <u>weakness:</u> one individual could be more dominant than others. Shy people may not express what they feel. <u>Strength</u>: get more responses. Need to cater for everybody. Gets a broad view. Doesn't take as long
- **Observations** – <u>weakness</u>: not really getting answers, but just seeing what they are doing
- **Questionnaires** – <u>strength</u>: official, doesn't take as long. Can get more answers and honesty. <u>Weakness</u>: questions can be ambiguous, sometimes doesn't fit what people think. You need to get accurate and correct data
- **Reviewing secondary data** – <u>strength</u>: cost-effective, cutting down time. <u>Weakness</u>: might not be up-to-date information. Tends to be a small cohort (biased data)

Research Design
- **Research topic:** students learning effectively
- **Research question:** what does the School of Social Sciences and Psychology needs to know about students to teach them effectively?
- **Specific aims:** to provide students with the adequate tools to learn effectively

- **Method:** focus groups. Record data. Thematic analysis. Semi-structured. Qualitative (it is good that you included the ways you were going to analyse the data)

*Note: make sure that aims and questions are as specific as possible.

How do we Determine the Success of a Research Project?
- Is there a clearly defined research question/aim?
- Was the research question answered or the aims achieved?
- Were the methods appropriate?
- What were the limitations of the study?
- Were the limitations notified and addressed by the researchers?

Possible limitations:
- **Research bias**
  - The relationship between who funds the research and the research aims and outcomes (e.g. self-evaluation, government funding)
  - Who did the research? Is there a reason they might want to report the results in a particular way? i.e. highlight certain factors, downplay others. Do you have a reason to believe they have done this? i.e. is there other research that contradicts these findings
  - Researchers qualifications and associations with particular organisations – this may impact research outcomes
- **Methodological limitations**
  - How were the participants recruited?
  - Where the participants compensated for their participation?
  - Sampling limitations/exclusions – who was excluded and why? Is this justifiable?
- **Does sample size matter?**
  - How big was the sample? Was the sample big enough to be able to make generalisations about the group in question?

The Interview Method
How do we Conduct Interviews?
- Why use interviews?
  - To find out more in-depth information from people
  - You might know from the outside that you want qualitative data and that interviews could be the best way to do this
  - Gets more perspectives
  - Can be more honest (see body language)
  - Useful when we know very little about a topic
  - Helpful in regards to providing participants with a voice – enables participants to give a platform to speak out about what is important to them