

Read the following student response to the question below:

**With reference to sociological studies, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of using more than one method in sociological research.**

#### Task

The paragraphs are numbered, but are not in the order as written by the student.

Rearrange them into a logical and coherent order. As you do, consider the following questions:

1. Are there any redundant paragraphs – that is, those which do not address the question?
2. Are there any paragraphs you could write, which would improve the essay?
3. Are there any concepts the candidate has used, but not explained?
4. Has the student referred to sociological studies?
5. If so, have they been applied to the question or used as an add-on?

#### Paragraph one

Realists argue that we should use several methods that are fit for purpose. For example, using quantitative and qualitative data enables you to see patterns and facts and also, why things happen, as opposed to just seeing one or the other. An example of how this can be successful is Barker and the Moonies. Barker spent seven years interviewing, observing and participating in Moonie behaviour. By using several methods, Barker was able to gain a good level of *verstehen*. Barker was able to conclude that the Moonies wanted to be there and were not brainwashed.

#### Paragraph two

One of the strengths of using mixed methods in sociological research is that it allows you to gather more data that is richer in depth and detail, such as using open questioned questionnaires and unstructured interviews. This is qualitative data. If the data is richer in detail, it means that it is high in validity and thus your findings are a true measurement of what you set out to aim to measure. An example of using mixed methods is seen in Eileen Barker's 'Making of a Moonie' study, where she used data collection methods, including overt participant observation and questionnaires. Both of these allowed her to achieve rich, detailed data which she may not have been able to achieve from using just one method. It also allowed her to achieve more of an empathetic understanding of the people she was studying (*verstehen* – Weber).

**Paragraph three**

One of the strengths of using only one method, rather than mixed methods, can be seen in Fawbert's research on hoodies. He did a content analysis of newspapers and was able to conclude that the media was creating a moral panic over hoodies. He was able to come to his conclusion much quicker, than if he had used several methods.

**Paragraph four**

Different types of sociologists have put forward various ideas as to how research is best to be carried out. Using more than one method when conducting sociological research is known as using mixed methods and some sociologists use a triangulation of methods to help them decide which methods are best for their research. They could use a number of mixed methods, including questionnaires, content analysis and interviews. Using mixed methods is known as methodological pluralism or methodological triangulation and is favoured by realists. Realists use more than one method.

**Paragraph five**

However, using more than one method to collect data can cause practical issues, in terms of time. Although using more than one method can achieve detailed data, it can also be very time consuming to analyse. For example, in Barker's study, which took her seven years, she would have to analyse all of the findings from the questionnaires, as well as her notes from her observations and record these, which would have taken a very long time.

**Paragraph six**

On the other hand, one of the strengths of using multiple methods is that you can achieve both primary and secondary data, thus data that is valid (secondary data) and data that is reliable. You are also aware of how it is gathered, for example, you could use observations as well as personal diaries.

**Paragraph seven**

However, as well as the data from more than one method being time consuming to analyse, it is also time consuming to conduct and can be costly to conduct. Having to use more than one method of data collection is going to take the researcher a lot of time, especially depending on what topic and who they are conducting the research on. For example, in Dobash and Dobash's study, unstructured interviews could take them up to 8 hours per interview to conduct because of the fact they were researching an extremely sensitive issue. Thus this conveys how long one method can take to conduct, not including others as well. Furthermore, the fact that it can take the researchers a long time could also increase the cost, as researchers need to be funded throughout the process of a research study, thus if it takes a long time to conduct, then the cost of the research may increase.

**Paragraph eight**

Also, using more than one method of data collection allows you to acquire a lot of detail, from a small sample, as seen in Barker's 'Making of a Moonie' study. In this study, the sample wasn't very large and thus was not very representative. However, using more than one method, including overt participation observations and questionnaires, allowed her to achieve large amounts of data on a very unique and hard-to-access group of people in society. Having said this, again, it would be very time consuming to acquire and to analyse.

**Paragraph nine**

Having said this, using more than one method in sociological research allows you to achieve data that is quantitative, as well as qualitative. For example, in Stanworth's study into classes of A Level students in a further education college, which was both a positivist and an interpretivist study, she used quantitative and qualitative data collection methods – questionnaires as well as unstructured interviews. Thus achieving both of these types of data, allowing you to achieve data that is high in validity (the qualitative data) but data that is also high in reliability (the quantitative data).

**Paragraph ten**

Overall, using more than one method in sociological research, like realists do, has both strengths and weaknesses that come with it, including time practicalities, but also large amounts of data that is valid.