

The Field Stage

Real fieldwork/ data collection/actual fieldwork/fieldwork excursion

This is the second stage of fieldwork which involves application of the methods and tools selected to obtain information. Only information related to the topic and objectives should be collected. The methods used during fieldwork include.

Observation

Observation involves using eyes with the help of other senses to see geographical phenomena in the field and sort out information about them.

Advantages of observation

- Firsthand information is obtained since geographical phenomena are seen directly.
- It saves time as a large field can be covered in a short time.
- It enables the researcher to develop a mental map of the area studied and therefore high chances of memorizing what the field is like.
- It is cheap because it does not involve expenditure.

Disadvantages of observation

- It is hard to find out information that cannot be seen like historical background.
- Some important features can be left out especially when the researcher lacks proper observation skills and has sensory problems.
- Information from inaccessible places may not be obtained.
- Information obtained is largely subjective/biased depending on individual interpretation and preferences.
- It is limited by physical obstructions like dense forests, mist, fog, smoke and hilly landscape.

Interviewing

Interviewing involves a face-face interaction between a researcher and respondent in the field whereby the researcher asks oral questions and the respondents give oral answers.

Advantages of interviewing

- It enables getting the required data on the spot since features are seen directly.
- It allows obtaining invisible information like historical background because respondents give answers about such information.
- It is very flexible because questions can be modified during the interview.

- Firsthand information is obtained which is often accurate since features are seen directly.
- It creates the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee because of the dialogue involved.
- The method can be administered to both the literate and illiterate since it involves oral questions and oral answers.

Disadvantages of interviewing

- It is affected by language barrier especially where the researcher does not understand the language being used by the local people.
- It is time consuming especially where a number of people have to be interviewed
- Direct hostilities may occur where the people do not understand the aims of the research.
- The method is liable to exaggeration and bias.
- Some information can be left out because it is considered confidential or embarrassing for example on security and people's income.
- Many people are reluctant to spare time and give information.

Questionnaire method

This involves the use of predetermined questions to collect information about geographical phenomena where the researcher sends written questions for a respondent to give written answers.

Advantages of questionnaire method

- It saves time as many respondents can be reached in a short time.
- Reliable data is got since respondents answer independently.
- It is easy to administer since it can reach respondents in different ways.
- There is no risk of harassment by uncooperative respondents even when sensitive questions are asked since questions are answered in absence of the researcher.
- The method is suitable for obtaining information from distant places because questions can be sent using various modes like Mail, post office.

Disadvantages of questionnaire method

- The method is rigid i.e. the information obtained cannot easily be changed in the absence of the respondents.

- The method is only limited to literate people who can write and read.
- Few people are willing to spare time to answer and return the questionnaires.
- The method is expensive e.g. money is required to buy papers, type the questions and send them through post office and collect the responses.
- It requires a lot of time to formulate the questions, type them, send the questions and receive the feedback.
- The task of assessing and analyzing data is laborious because it deals with a number of people.

Measurement / Measuring

This involves the use of calibrated and non-calibrated instruments to establish/ investigate size, weight and area of geographical features in the field

NB. Estimation, involves the use of non-calibrated instruments to establish/investigate size, weight area etc. of geographical features in the field for example pacing, using jerry cans and ropes etc.

Pacing involves the use of strides to establish distance of the geographical features.

Advantages of measuring

- It enables the researcher to establish the quantitative characteristics of geographical phenomena because tools are used.
- It is flexible since different tools and techniques can be used
- It enables making predictions about the phenomena investigated because different tools are used.
- Firsthand information is obtained since tools are directly applied in the field.

Disadvantages of measuring

- It is expensive since several instruments are required for example tape measure, foot ruler etc.
- It is laborious during conversion of scale.
- It cannot be applied in inaccessible areas like flooded areas.
- Obsolete tools cannot generate accurate data.
- Faulty tools lead to wrong information obtained.
- There is always variation in paces.

Sampling

Sampling involves taking part of the whole population to represent the whole/rest.

Advantages of sampling

- It is time saving since few entities/items are chosen to represent the rest.
- It allows detailed study of the sample to be made, thus it yields a lot of information since part of a geographical phenomenon is observed.
- Unbiased data is got because the researcher comes into contact with the phenomena.
- It allows generalization to be made about other similar phenomena since a sample is a representative of other features.
- Disadvantages of sampling.
- It tends to generalize too much and some of the unique characteristics of geographical phenomena are left out.
- A sample which is not representative of the population leads to wrong conclusions

Recording

Recording refers to the writing/jotting/noting or drawing or photographing or video covering of information in the field.

Advantages of recording

- It is flexible and convenient since it can be done in different ways.
- It ensures a permanent record about the field for future reference since information is put down.
- It enables making of inferences about the field studied due to presence of ready information.

Disadvantages of recording

- It is expensive since it requires resources like pens, pencils, papers etc.
- It requires certain skills like drawing skills.

NB. The methods of recording involve;

- **Tabulation** is a method of recording involving summarizing of information obtained from the field in form of tables.

- **Photography** is a method of recording which involves using a camera to take photographs specific geographical features in the field.
- **Videography** is a method of recording which involves the use of video camera to take videos of specific geographical features in the field
- **Note making is** *the use of a pen, pencils and papers to note down geographical information in the field.*
- **Field Sketching** *is the technique of obtaining information from the field by drawing sketchmaps, transects and panorama.*

A sketchmap should have a complete title showing the name of the area studied and features required, a complete frame, compass direction, key/labelling and indicate the features required with their local place names.

— Features should be represented by symbols and shadings and not pictures.

A panorama/landscape sketch/sketch diagram involves sketching features in the field while standing at a view point.

— It should have a complete title showing the name of the area studied and features required, a complete frame, a view point, and labeling, and indicate features required in pictorial form.

— Features should be real pictures and not symbols.

A transect/line transect/cross section/transverse/relief section/sketch section should have a complete title (showing name of the area studied, end points and features required), labelling/key, direction showing end points, shading and features required.

- An arrow should touch the pictures, pictures should be drawn to represent prominent features (features with a vertical height above the ground) and an arrow should touch the ground in case of linear features (features which do not have vertical height above the ground) like a roads, railways, streams, rivers etc.
- Pictures should touch the ground and not hang in space or enter the ground.

Advantages of field sketching

- It helps students to acquire skills in drawing sketches like sketch maps, transects and panorama due to their practice in the field.
- Sketches summarise geographical information obtained from the field since major features are indicated with their relative positions.

- It ensures permanent record about the field for future reference since sketches are stored.
- It enables the making of inferences/conclusions about the field studied because different features are observed relative to each other.

Disadvantages of field sketching

- The method is expensive since it requires various tools.
- Unpredictable changes in weather like heavy downpour may hinder the use of this method to collect information.
- Physical obstruction hinders effective application of the method.
- It is time consuming since many features are indicated.

Map Orientation

Map orientation involves alignment/ rotating/ turning of the survey map/base map so that the features on the base map tally/match with features on the ground.

Advantages of map orientation

- It helps in updating geographical information on a given survey map/base map by identifying new features.
 - It helps in finding of directions of features by comparing the relative location of features.
 - It helps in comparisons of features on the map anti those on the ground.
- Disadvantages of map orientation.
- It is expensive to administer since it requires a lot of resources especially survey maps.
 - Application of the method requires high degree of skills to interpret features on the map.

Analysis of existing information/library research/documentary review/literature review/documentation

This is a method of data collection whereby the researcher gets information from existing records/ secondary sources and compares it with what is in the field at the time of study.

Advantages of documentary review

- Information is provided in a short period of time since it is readily available in documents.
- Accurate information based on research can be obtained
- It helps in getting the background information about the topic of study

- On spot observation from the field helps to crosscheck what is written

Disadvantages of documentary review

- The existing information may be obsolete and therefore may not be useful for the fieldwork study.
- Records may be non-existent because some people see no value of record keeping or some record is damaged for example due to poor storage