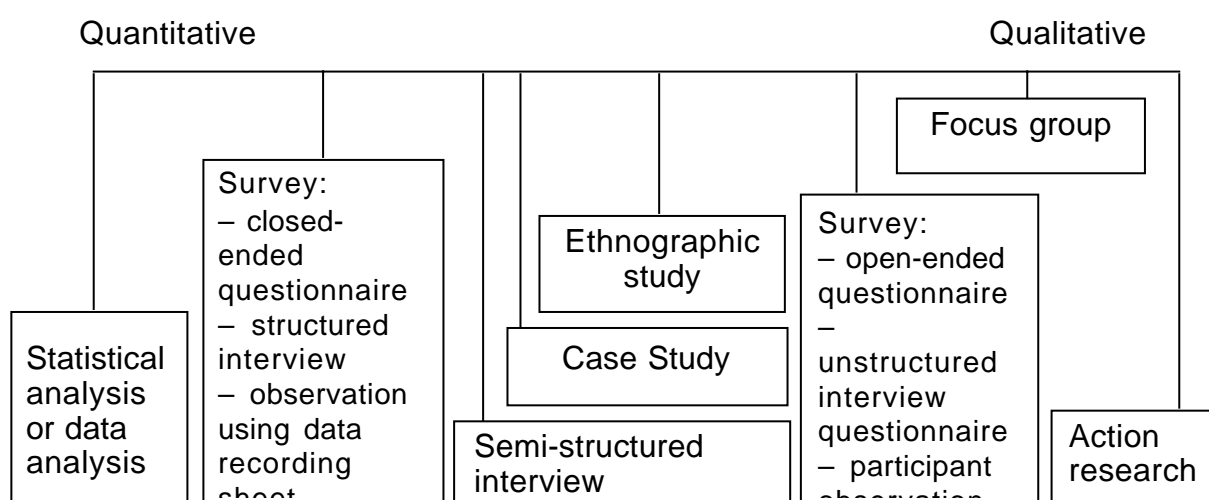


## 8.2 Social and Cultural Research Methodologies

During the study of both the Preliminary and HSC courses, students will need to develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of research methodologies and the techniques used to conduct research. Students will also need to develop skills in planning research tasks, devising their research instruments, applying them, collating and analysing data, and presenting their findings in a variety of ways to different audiences.

Research methodologies exist on a continuum from quantitative methodologies to qualitative methodologies, that is, from methodologies that easily measure and quantify data to those that collect detailed and less measurable and, therefore, less quantifiable data. Few methodologies are exclusively quantitative or qualitative.



While most methodologies contain both quantitative and qualitative elements, the characteristics of methodologies can be placed in two broad groups.

Quantitative Methodologies:	Qualitative Methodologies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are removed from the original data</li> <li>result in numerical data, tables, graphs and diagrams</li> <li>use survey questionnaires and statistics as their main techniques</li> <li>enable the collection of highly specific data from large populations</li> <li>are easy to compare with other studies</li> <li>rely heavily on the researcher's organisational skills in writing the research questions, ie at the beginning of the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are close to the original data</li> <li>result in descriptive prose, quotations and summaries</li> <li>use personal interviews and observations as their main techniques</li> <li>enable detailed data to be obtained, but for a small populations only</li> <li>are difficult to compare with other studies</li> <li>rely heavily on the researcher's interpretive skills to understand the complexities of the resulting data, ie at the end of the process</li> </ul>

## Ethical Research

Social and cultural researchers are expected to conduct research in an ethical manner.

Consideration should be given to such things as:

- gaining consent from participants and maintaining confidentiality and where appropriate, their anonymity
- whether the research prejudices or poses a threat to the researcher or others in the school or wider community
- whether the research places the participants at risk.

The researcher needs to be consciously aware of any assumptions that may underlie the research. They also need to be aware that the agenda of the researcher may influence choice of methodology.

## The Process of Research

The process of research has several distinct characteristics or stages. Research should begin with a specific question, problem or topic of interest that is clearly defined in the mind of the researcher.

Next, the researcher must develop a conscious plan to give direction to the research effort. Planning requires the researcher to break the problem, question or topic into manageable sections that suggest directions for the researcher. The researcher needs to be conscious of any assumptions that may underlie the research.

The next step in the process is to collect whatever facts might be appropriate to the problem, question or topic. Appropriate choice of the methodology or methodologies to be used to collect information (data) is critical at this point.

Different types of research questions or problems will require different methodologies.

After the data is collected, it is then organised and its meaning is interpreted. It is the interpretation of meaning from the accumulated facts and its relationship to the initial problem, question or topic, that is the essence of the research process.

Finally, the research findings and the interpretation of their meaning must be effectively communicated.

*The process of research is important to the core and depth studies, as well as the personal interest project.*