**FIELDWORK NOTES**

This is the scientific study done away from classroom where students use the environment as a laboratory to; observe, record, and interpret for themselves the realities of man and his environment. The environment includes the things, that surround man both physical and human e.g. the soils, rocks, vegetation cover, water bodies, relief etc.

**REASONS FOR CARRYING OUT FIELDWORK**

* It enables a geographer to find out the changing patterns on the earth’s surface i.e. in terms of landform evolution and land use patterns given the fact that geography is a dynamic subject.
* It makes Geography real whereby one is able to compare information acquired from textbooks and the information existing on the ground
* It helps a geographer to get local examples directly in the field rather than relying on the theory from text books.
* Fieldwork also helps students gain geographical skills e.g. Observation, recording, sample, sampling and sketching etc
* It also breaks down the monotony of the same place or classroom where students conduct their geography lessons
* It equips students with research methods which are relevant not only to secondary level but all throughout the training process.
* By carrying out fieldwork, the students are in the position to establish the relationship between human activities and the physical environment
* It builds a student’s attitude and value of judgment.

However fieldwork has some limitations or disadvantages for instance

* The whole process of fieldwork is very expensive.
* There are also likely dangers of hostility of the researcher or students.
* Absence of trained personnel in the field or area of study.
* Unpredictability of the changes for instance in weather or security of a given area of study
* Lack of skills by students to handle the fieldwork process for instance interpretation and analysis of data.

**PROCEDURE OF CARRYING FIELDWORK**

Fieldwork is divided into (three) 3 major stages.

* **The pre-fieldwork (preparation); this involves the preparations made before one sets off to the field.**
* The data collection stage (actual fieldwork stage); this involves the actual collection of data while the researcher is in the field or area of study.
* The follow-up stage; this takes place after the researcher comes back from the field and organizes the collected data into a report.

**PREPARATION STAGE /PRE-FIELD ARRANGEMENTS**

Before one goes to the field to collect dada, there are a number of steps under taken and such steps including the following;

* A pilot study is carried out; this is the pre-visit made to the area of study before the real field work. it’s usually carried by the teacher or sometimes the teacher and some students
* After the pilot study, the researcher identifies/develops the topic of the study which must be researchable, geographical and specific
* The researcher is supposed to formulate the objectives for the study. these should be S M A R T

\*S- Specific

\*M- measureable

\* A- Achievable

\* R- Realistic

\*T- Time bound

* The researcher chooses the methods of data collection. the selection of the study methods of study depends on the information to be collected , nature of the area of study e.g. observation, sampling ,measurement, recording ,interviewing etc

**NB. These first four steps are usually followed In order and should not be interchanged when preparing for fieldwork.**

* Selection of tools or instruments to be used in the field; the tools or instruments are chosen depending on the area of study and the methods to be used e.g. Pens ,pencils ,paper ,hoe ,panga etc
* Seeking for permission; In order for fieldwork to be successful, permission must be sought from the different stakeholders for examples school administration, management of the area of study
* Dividing students into groups; where students are many, they are divided into groups to facilitate the acquisition of information. Each group is given a group leader and assigned work basing on the objectives of the study.
* Briefing of students ; this is so important because it orients the students to the dos and don’ts /the rules and regulations of the area of study
* Review of previous literature; students are encouraged to review the existing literature available on the topic of study before going to the field.
* Organization of logistics; Incase the fieldwork is to be carried out in a distant place, arrangements must be made which shall facilitate movement. Transport, food, and other logistics are made available to students.
* Departure. After all the above steps are fulfilled, the students should be set for departure to go to the field.

**DATA COLLECTION STAGE/ ACTUAL FIELDWORK STAGE**

This is the second stage of fieldwork. it involves the various activities carried out during the study i.e. while in the field and therefore it involves the application of the various methods . However, in order to apply these methods, one is required to **correctly know the definitions/ descriptions of each of these methods and should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each of them.** The various methods to be applied include;

* **OBSERVATION;** This involves the use of sight (eyes) and other senses like hearing, smelling etc to sort out geographical information as it appears in the field at a specific period of time.

**Advantages of observation method**

* First hand information is obtained since geographical phenomena are seen directly
* It saves time as a large area/field can be covered in a short time
* It enables the researcher to develop a mental map of the area studied or memorizing what the field is like
* It is cheap because it does not involve expenditure.
* It is accurate because various geographical phenomena are observed directly, analyzed, and concluded there and then

**Disadvantages**

* Its often affected by obstructions for instance tall buildings, vegetation, hills, fog, dust etc
* it is exposed to the researchers bias, selective perception and selective memory
* Observation cannot provide about the past and future for instance historical background ,future prospects
* It may arouse suspicion and therefore harassment from other land users when one is observing or not talking
* It may be limited by abrupt weather changes e.g. mist, fog, rainy conditions etc
* It requires the physical presence of the observer
* **Interviewing method;**

This is a face- to- face dialogue or conversation between the researcher and the respondents in the field; Where by the researcher asks oral questions and respondents gives oral answers.

**Advantages**

* **I**t enables getting the required data on the spot. Information collected can be corrected at the spot.
* It is flexible because questions can be modified during the interview, interview can be adjusted to meet many diverse situations. For instance they can be adjusted to fit the appropriate understanding of the respondent.
* It allows obtaining invisible information, for instance the historical background and future prospects of the area of study.
* First-hand information is got; which is often accurate. For instance, one can get the factors for the establishment of plantations in Uganda from the field officers at Kasuku Tea Estate in Buikwe.
* It doesn’t limit the researcher to literacy i.e. one doesn’t have to be educated so as to give information. (It is easy to administer)

**Disadvantages**

* It is limited by language barrier and therefore one may need an interpreter which may be expensive and with many other associated problems.
* It is time consuming especially where a number of people have to be interviewed.
* Hostility from the respondents. Some interviewees are hostile to the students because of the past frustration.
* Interviewing is also associated withholding of information especially where the questions tend to be personal for instance respondents are normally not willing to publicize their incomes.
* It may be costly if it involves paying for the interviews.
* It is liable to exaggeration and bias. The interviewee may give answers he or she thinks are acceptable or will impress the researcher or interviewer.
* It can easily be affected by noise pollution especially when conducted in a noisy place like a market.

**RECORDING/ DOCUMENTATION:**

This involves writing/making permanent records of information got in the field in form of notes, photographs, sketches, tables etc using pens, pencils cameras, recorders, etc

**Advantages**

* It is flexible and convenient as it can be done in different ways e.g. sketches, notes voices etc.
* Ensures a permanent record about the field for future references
* It enables making of inferences/conclusions about the field studied.

**Disadvantages/ limitations**

* Wrong information may be stored where faulty recording devices are used e.g. faulty cameras, faulty recorders, etc
* It may be affected by sudden weather changes e.g. strong winds may limit the use of voice recorders, heavy rainfall, etc.
* Recording can be affected by noise pollution especially in busy areas like markets, industries, etc.
* Inadequate/ insufficient recording material e.g. Inadequate stationery, inadequate cameras, etc.

**Measurements**

This involves use of calibrated ( standardized ) and non-calibrated instruments like tape measure, weighing scales, ropes tins etc to establish/ investigate length, size, weight, area of geographical features in the field.

**Advantages**

* It enables the researcher to establish the quantitative characteristics of geographical phenomena e.g. size, weight and length, etc
* It is flexible as different tools and techniques can be used e.g. both calibrated and non- calibrated tools can be used.
* It enables making predictions about the phenomena investigated

**Disadvantages**

* **W**here faulty/ out-dated tools are used, inaccurate information is got.
* Use of non-calibrated tools result into getting inaccurate information
* Measurements can be limited by inaccessibility due to obstruction by vegetation, steep slopes, wetlands and boggy soils
* Abrupt weather changes e.g. rainfall leading to floods or slippery grounds
* It requires some quantitative skills which some people don’t have. This may result into inaccurate information.

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

This involves use of predetermined questions or a list of questions to collect information about geographical phenomena. The question are either posted or delivered in person to the respondents who answer them by writing.

**Advantages**

* It saves time as many respondents can be reached in a short time.
* Reliable data is got since respondents answer the questions independently.

It therefore offers greater assurance of anonymity/ provides confidentiality since the questionnaires are filled in the absence of the researcher.

* Its easy to administer since it can reach respondents in different ways e.g using email, posting e.t.c
* There are no risks of harassment by potential respondents even when sensitive questions are asked
* Its a convenient method i.e questionnaires can be completed at respondents’ convenience unlike the interviewing method where the interviewer demands an immediate answer from the respondent.

**Disadvantages/limitations**

* Due to lack of supervision while completing the questionnaires in the field by the respondents ,partial response or uncompleted questions may be got.
* Its not flexible; the information obtained cannot be easily changed in the absence of the respondent.
* The method is limited to literate people who can read and write.
* The method is expensive e.g money is required to buy paper, type questions e.t.c
* Some respondents may take time to return the questionnaires.

**SAMPLING;**

This method involves choosing /selecting part of the whole to represent the whole. the chosen portion is studied and its characteristics /views are taken to represent those of other similar features in the field.

**Advantages**

* It is time saving since few entities/items are chosen to represent the whole.
* Allows a detailed study of a sample to be made i.e. yields a lot of information.
* Unbiased data is obtained because the researcher comes into direct contact with the phenomena.
* It allows generalization to be made about other similar phenomena.

**Disadvantages/problems**

* Bias in selection is common .in most cases researchers only select people in the field who are interested in their study and some instances the selection of the respondents is gender biased.
* Lack of representative samples ; for instance when a fish landing site is visited, many of the interviewed people may not be fish mongers but just people living around the fishing village.
* It tends to generalize too much and some of the unique characteristics of phenomena are left out.
* It may be hindered by faulty tools.
* There is a problem of inaccessibility caused by physical barriers like forests, wetlands ,hills e.t.c

**MAP ORIENTATION;**

This technique involves turning/rotating the base map /survey map/map extract of the area being studied until the features on the map match/tally with those on the ground .it enables the researcher to identify local names, positions and patterns of features in the field.

**Disadvantages**

* Some features may no longer be traced especially human features
* Base maps are not easily got
* Obsolete/out-dated maps; some maps may contain old or out dated information
* Students may not be able to interpret the base maps because of the technical/difficult language used by cartographers.

**PACING;**

This involves use of physical strides to estimate s distance, size, and area covered by geographical features. Therefore, one is expected to use the legs by making short or strong strides which might be later converted into standard units. This method is cheap because there are no tools involved apart from the legs.

**Limitations/Disadvantages**

* It is inaccurate because it is based on estimation and people have different strides
* It might be hindered by physical barriers since some places may not be accessible

**SKETCHING;**

This is a method where a researcher uses a pen, pencil, and paper to draw, sketch maps, panoramas and line transect of the area of study .the sketches are drawn to show the different human and physical features of the area of the study.

**i) Sketch map**

This is a rough representation of geographical information in the field in diagrammatic form. A sketch map should have; a well elaborated title, frame, key/labels, compass, physical features and land use types or manmade features.

**NB;** A sketch map therefore should show these features using symbols, signs, labels e.t.c

**ii) Panoramas**

This involves drawing a sketch from a strategically raised ground ( view point). The features on a panorama must appear in a picture form to differentiate them from a sketch map. Panoramas are in most cases drawn from a view point or a raised area and only the features which are in front of the observer are included.

**ii) Transverse/Line transect/cross section**

This is a horizontal representation of relief and the associated land uses. It is also drawn using a pencil ad a paper and must be drawn from one point to another. A line transect must have a complete title ( i.e. showing the two points ) well labeled, direction whereby the direction of a line transect is represented by an arrow indicating from which point to which point e.g East-West ,North-South and preferably the name of the local places to another

**NB.** When answering questions about method, one is expected to;

* **Identify the method first**
* **Define / describe the method correctly by bringing out the idea of tools used**
* **Give the information got using the method.**

**FIELDWORK FINDINGS**

This refers to the information got/obtained during the study using the various methods stated above. It is these findings that make the basis of fieldwork i.e. getting geographical information ,understanding the geography of the area, drawing conclusions e,t,c. the findings are usually categorized into;

* Physical-physical findings ( relationships)
* Physical- human findings ( relationships)
* Human-human findings ( relationships )
* Physical-physical findings refer to geographical information where the physical aspects have a direct relationship with other physical aspects in the field e.g relationship between relief and drainage, relief and vegetation , vegetation and soils e.t.c
* Physical-human findings are those findings where the physical aspects have a relationship with the human aspects (man-made things/activities/ Land use types) e.g relief and settlements, soil and agriculture.
* Human –human findings are those findings where the human aspects have a relationship with other human aspects e.g transport and trade, trade and settlements e.t.c

**NB; when presenting the findings of the study one should;**

* **Identify the geographical relationship**
* **Explain ,account for the relationship by using words e.g due to, bec**ause of ,led to , favored ,attracted. Avoid using influenced.
* **Illustrate the geographical relationship by using using local examples and directions where applicable.**

**PROBLEMS FACED WHILE CARRYING OUT FIELDWORK**

There are a number of problems encountered while in the field and these may include;

* Physical obstructions i.e. tall buildings, hills, trees hence may hinder one from observing certain features or accessing some areas.
* Abrupt weather changes e.g. rainy, fog, misty, windy. Avoid mentioning sunshine.
* Language barrier
* Inadequate tools
* Obsolete tools/out-dated tools
* Hostile respondents
* Getting biased and exaggerated information.

**NB:**

* One should avoid personal problems e.g getting tired, anger, hunger e.t.c
* The problems which are valid should be geographical and illustrated with information missed or not got according to the objectives as evidence of being in the field

**THE FOLLOW-UP/ POST FIELDWORK STAGE**

This is the third and last stage of fieldwork. The cardinal purpose of the follow-up stage is re-organize the results or data and fostering a general comprehensive understanding of the field study through intellectual reflection aided by empirical data , it involves the different activities carried out after the fieldwork excursion i.e when back to school and these include ;

* Organization of the data: this is putting data into some systematic form
* Presentation and discussion of the data. In the preparation stage, students are divided into group and each group is allocated a leader. After the fieldwork excursion, the group leader presents their data on behalf of the other group members.
* Analysis and interpretation of data : Data analysis is examining what has been collected from the field of study
* Making comparisons/ relating: since different data is collected from different groups, therefore there is need to compare the different data presented by the different groups.
* Editing the data: this involves identifying and correcting the errors in the data.
* Polishing sketches and diagrams: the sketches drawn while in the field are often rough so there is need to polish them.
* Drawing conclusions: conclusions are drawn basing on data collected and then presented in form of findings or geographical relationships
* Making recommendations to stake holders: here a researcher gives some strategies which are or specific to solve the studied problem or the implementation of such strategies is expected to solve the problems studied in the field.
* Compiling /writing a fieldwork report: the student puts together all his/her findings into a final report or book following a standard procedure of writing a report.
* Disseminating findings of the study: the student can then distribute his findings to the different stake holders’ e.g. school administration, teachers, parents, school library etc.

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