Outline and explain two theoretical advantages of using interpretivist methods in sociological research (10)

One theoretical advantage of using Interpretivist methods in sociological research is that the data collected by these methods is qualitative. Interpretivists use methods such as unstructured interviews and participant observations which allow them to get close to the people they are researching and collect large amounts of data on the issue they are studying. For example, Paul Willis' research into anti-school subcultures used a range of interpretivist methods including observation and group interviews with a group of lads in *Learning to Labour*. As a result, Willis was able to get a real insight into the experiences of the lads and find out what meanings they gave to the social processes they experienced in schools and what motivated them to act the way they did. This qualitative information was able to be used to disprove ideas that students were passive in their exploitation, and it challenge the existing knowledge base of studies in education, particularly from a Marxist view point.

A second theoretical advantage that the use of Interpretivist methods has is the high level of validity that the research has because of the methods used. Methods such as unstructured interviews allow the research subject being interviewed the opportunity to expand on their answers and allows the research to guide the conversation based upon responses. In comparison to more rigid research methods that have higher reliability, like questionnaires and structured interviews, a skilled interviewer can probe the research subject and draw put responses which reveal that person's true feelings on a subject. Positivist methods on the other hand, may suffer from an imposition problem, which is where responses are fixed so they may be quantified. The use of interpretivist methods does not have this as it allows for full exposure and achieves verstehen, or insight into the person's feelings, meanings and motivations, which heightens the validity of what the method is trying to measure.