
A-LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

7192/1 Education with theory and methods
Report on the Examination

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General comments

In general, most students found this an accessible paper and the questions enabled them to demonstrate a range and depth of knowledge and understanding across the ability range. The vast majority appeared to have sufficient time to answer all of the questions to the best of their ability.

The legibility of handwriting continues to be a problem for a minority of students and for examiners who have to try and decipher their answers. Despite our very best efforts, answers that cannot be clearly read cannot be credited. Again, centres are reminded that applications for exam access arrangements need to be applied for in advance so that students are not disadvantaged.

Education

Question 01

A small number of students struggled with this question, perhaps because the theories are more often presented as being different rather than in terms of their similarities. However, most students were able to offer at least one similarity between functionalist and Marxist views of education. The most common answers were that both views argue that education prepares students for the workplace and/or that education is a secondary agent of socialisation. Most students then developed these points by providing an example from either or both of the functionalist or Marxist perspectives.

Question 02

There were a wide range of answers to this question. Many students took the approach of criticising marketisation policies generally. Students commonly referred to the 'myth of parentocracy' and/or that these policies may have led to greater inequalities as some schools may select students from some social groups over others. Other students referred to criticisms of specific marketisation policies, for example, that league tables may produce a misleading and inaccurate picture of the success of a school. Some less successful students drifted into criticisms of privatisation in education without any success of linking this in any way to marketisation. Some others referred to more general and non-relevant policies such as the tripartite system.

Question 03

In general, this question was answered well and students were able to apply good knowledge and understanding of the ways that the hidden curriculum may help to reproduce the social class structure. Most students were able to recognise the hooks in the item and then develop these to varying degrees of success. For example, many were able to develop the hook that 'pupils are told that everyone has the same opportunity to succeed' with discussion of Bowles and Gintis theory of the 'myth of meritocracy'. Some students were then able to develop this further and explain with examples how labelling and setting and streaming may contribute to the myth of meritocracy. The most successful answers were then able to explain how these processes, as part of the hidden curriculum, then help to reproduce the social class structure. For example, some explained that the working class were more likely to be placed in lower sets and therefore miss out on top knowledge that prevents them from achieving upward social mobility. There were some students who attempted to use the item by making reference to the last line of the item which is a rewording of the question and should not be seen as a valid use of any hook that requires development.

However, a small number of students ignored the item and made no reference to the hooks in their answer and therefore were not able to achieve marks in the 4-7 level (or higher). Less successful answers focussed on functionalist explanations of how schools can be meritocratic but were then unable to say how this helps to reproduce the social class structure. Some answers also drifted into external factors with no clear reference to the hidden curriculum.

Question 04

This question provided opportunities for students to draw upon their knowledge and understanding across the education topic. Many students referred to Bernstein's study of 'speech codes' in explaining the ways in which language may effect educational achievement. Additionally, many used Sugarman's study to explain the ways that 'delayed gratification' or having 'fatalistic' attitudes, for example, may affect achievement. Furthermore, successful answers included reference to Boudieu's work on 'cultural capital' in outlining ways in which cultural factors may explain patterns of educational achievement.

However, some students were less clear on what is and is not a 'cultural factor'. A number of students saw cultural factors as synonymous with external factors and structured their answers around external vs internal factors explaining differential achievement between social groups. Many of these answers did not explain how these internal factors, such as labelling, are linked to cultural factors. Furthermore, some students then continued to offer bolt-on evaluation of these explanations without any clear explanation for the relevance to this question. Most students focussed on cultural factors related to social class in particular, as well as ethnicity. A number of students who referred to gender tended to present this as an alternative argument with no clear application to culture and therefore not applied clearly to this particular question.

A large number of answers referred to material factors as evaluation, usually juxtaposed. Some students gave lengthy explanations of a range of material factors but did not always make this relevant to cultural factors. As well as having good range and depth of cultural factors, the more successful answers were able to explain how material factors may underpin cultural factors; that they may compensate for cultural factors and/ or that material and cultural factors are intertwined. Furthermore, the more successful students were able to provide further explicit evaluation of the cultural factors outlined. For example, some students criticised 'cultural deprivation' explanations as victim blaming and/or that these explanations do not account for why some groups of students still manage to achieve well despite being 'culturally deprived'.

Methods in Context

Question 05

This question showed a range of knowledge and understanding of strengths and limitations of self-completion questionnaires. For example, many students outlined strengths and limitations linked to practical issues (such as costs and distribution), response rates and accuracy of the information gained from self-completion questionnaires. Whilst some were able to develop these strengths and limitations using correct conceptual language, others did conflate and/or confuse concepts such as validity and reliability. Some answers also made assertions about self-completion questions (eg 'not being valid') whereas better answers were able to explain that issues of validity and reliability are more nuanced.

Similarly, to previous series, a number of students developed some of these strengths and limitations of self-completion questionnaires to issues of studying education more generally. For example, some students explained that self-completion questionnaires are more likely to get permission from gatekeepers (school leaders and parents) as they are less likely to interrupt lessons in the same way as other methods.

The most successful students were able to apply the strengths and limitations to the specifics of the issue in the question. For example, as self-completion questionnaires are often completed in private and are anonymous, respondents (such as students) may be more likely to express their opinions about the pressures that their parents or teachers may be putting on them without fear of any repercussions or upsetting them. Additionally, some were able to develop the issue of 'operationalising' in the item, in explaining the issue with measuring and defining 'pressure' and 'high grades' when completing a questionnaire in the absence of any researcher that may be able to clarify any misunderstanding.

Theory and Methods

Question 06

It was really pleasing to see that the vast majority of students were at least able to attempt this question. This indicated better time management or that this question was more accessible when compared with some other questions in previous series.

There were a range of reasons offered for why sociologists may choose to use research methods that produce quantitative data. A number of answers provided a list of reasons as part of their answer. The more successful answers focussed on two reasons and were able to develop these with concepts and examples to illustrate. For example, some students explained that methods that produce quantitative data are more likely to be able to establish cause and effect relationships and that this data is favoured by positivists who prefer to study 'social facts' and use this data to be able to make predictions about human behaviour in society. Some were able to apply examples, such as Durkheim's study of suicide, to illustrate these arguments.

There were a number of students who proceeded to evaluate the reasons they provided for this question. Students should be reminded that there are no available marks for evaluation in this question type.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.