



AS-LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

7191/1: Education with Methods in Context
Report on the Examination

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General

In general, most students found the paper accessible and the paper performed comparatively well with previous series. The vast majority of students attempted all questions and there were very small numbers of students who left questions unanswered. Once again, there was clear evidence that students had been prepared well for this paper, as they demonstrated good knowledge and understanding and were able to apply material appropriately.

Education

Question 01

Most students had some understanding of the term 'cultural capital', but many only gained one mark for a partial definition. This was mostly as a result of students recognising the 'cultural' part of the question: eg referring to aspects of knowledge; way of life; language that the middle class students possess but neglecting to refer to 'capital' or the idea of providing them with an advantage. Some students confused cultural with economic advantages. More successful answers referred to the middle class way of life, for example by identifying language provided middle-class children with an advantage at school or helped them to achieve educational success, with some students (although not necessary for the 2 marks) referring directly to Bourdieu's work.

Question 02

There was a wide range of answers provided for this question. A large number of students struggled to identify an explicit way in which schools select students. For example, many offered 'social class' as a way that schools select without mentioning any explicit way in which schools select on that basis. Furthermore, despite the question stating 'other than by academic ability', many students offered selection criteria that referred to ability, for example 'by testing students'. Most students that offered 'social class' as a selection criterion then went on to explain that this was because it would help schools to improve their ranking in league tables, and so was implicitly about ability and therefore not credit worthy. In addition, most students who offered selection by 'sex' then went on to explain that this is because girls do better in tests and portray the school in a more positive light, and therefore was again about ability and not worthy of the full 2 marks. Other students offered 'cream skimming' without any mention of the process of selection. More successful answers were often based around the ideas of 'catchment area' or 'faith' which then were explained by, for example, stating 'by selecting students who live in a certain proximity of the school' or 'selecting students that could demonstrate church attendance'.

Question 03

This question seemed challenging to many students. Although some were able to successfully outline three criticisms, most struggled to offer more than one or two. Many answers were centred around the criticism of schools being a meritocracy and then explained the criticism with reference to Marxism or social class. The better answers were able to clearly identify the functionalist view on education in order to highlight a weakness of that view, for example that functionalism was overly positive; too deterministic; failed to look at micro interactions; and lacking in training students with specialist skills etc. Unfortunately, however, many students simply provided alternative views from alternative theories and perspectives, without applying their answer explicitly to functionalism.

Question 04

There was clear evidence of teachers preparing students well to answer this question, for example by ensuring that students answered the question with two distinct paragraphs, and without the need for an introduction or conclusion. Students found no difficulty in identifying two relevant policies that have influenced gender differences in achievement, either directly such as through the National Curriculum, coursework, GIST/WISE; or indirectly, by means of the Equal Pay Act or Sex Discrimination Act. However, students then struggled to achieve answers in the top band due to their inability to develop their answers, and/or clearly explain how their chosen policy may have influenced differences in educational achievement between males and females. There was a tendency to over focus on female achievement rather than on explaining gender differences, and this failure by a large number of students to explore how policies may have helped females and discouraged males, meant many students remained in the middle band. Some answers drifted into subject choice or identified policies which were clearly more associated with social class rather than gender differences and as a result they failed to apply their answer specifically to the question set.

Question 05

Students confidently offered a wide range of factors, from both inside and outside the school, to explain the differences in achievement between social classes. Some were able to use the item to gear the answer in exploring issues relating to labelling and other internal processes, as well as cultural and material factors. Less successful answers did not apply their answer explicitly to the question, for example by focusing on differences in achievement, and often became descriptive rather than analytical. Others insisted on giving large accounts of studies, for example by Becker and Rist, but without explaining the relevance to the question, and therefore were presented as a regurgitation of revised notes about social class and education more generally, rather than a reasoned response to the question. In general, students appeared to prefer external factors that related to material and cultural deprivation, in particular language and cultural capital deprivation, and provided only a very thin account of internal factors. Furthermore, there was an overwhelming tendency to offer a range of internal and external factors in a list like fashion which were juxtaposed and lacked a clear debate for the top bands.

More sophisticated answers were able to explore, in depth, a range of internal factors and offered some explicit evaluation of the significance of these factors in relation to both working class and middle class achievement. Successful evaluation also included the ability to explore how internal and external factors were inextricably linked, and being able to offer a well-informed conclusion to the question.

Methods in Context**Question 06**

In general, students tended to find this question difficult, with a large number of answers only demonstrating limited knowledge and understanding of structured interviews. There was some confusion about the strengths and limitations of structured interviews, as many drifted into a discussion of alternative methods, and in particular unstructured interviews. A number of students were uncertain about the type of data obtained from using structured interviews, and there was further confusion between the issues of reliability and validity and of the differences between positivist and interpretivist theories. Students who used the item were often more successful in their understanding of the methodology.

It is clear that students are now being well prepared to use their application skills to 'apply' methodology issues and to studying education more generally, for example with many students referring to the practical issues with gaining access through the 'gatekeepers'. Some were then able to apply this further to the method by explaining, for example, that gatekeepers such as headteachers would be unlikely to permit many students to be out of lessons for interviewing. However, the most sophisticated applications occurred when students were able to apply the strengths and limitations of structured interviews to the specific issue in the question ie to pupils' decisions on their career choices. For example, some students were able to identify the lack of a rapport gained using structured interviews, and how it leads to an inability of students wanting to discuss their future if they felt embarrassed by the job or career they wanted to do, or the type of university they planned to attend.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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