



A-LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

7192/1: Education with Theory and Methods
Report on the Examination

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General

Student responses to this paper, in this third year of the new A Level specification, showed clear differences in ability to demonstrate the skills of knowledge, application, analysis and evaluation in their responses. The extended writing questions were excellent discriminators of these skills. The 10-mark item question continues to provide a good illustration of application skills; fewer students than previously failed to identify a 'hook' in the item, and fewer failed to apply points successfully from the item, as this question requires. However, for the Methods in Context question few students were able to apply their knowledge of the given research method to the issue specified in the question. There was also evidence of some very well taught and well prepared students, which was particularly evident amongst responses for Question 04.

Most students seemed to have managed their time appropriately; however, a small minority left some questions unanswered, noticeably Question 06. A significant number of students wrote too much for the 4-mark and 6-mark questions, although fewer than in the two previous years. Centres are reminded that these small-mark questions are best answered with a clear 'point' and 'development' structure, rather than lengthy continuous prose. It was pleasing to see more students offering detailed plans prior to writing their answer to the extended questions. However, there was an increase in the number of scripts that were very difficult to read this year, and centres should consider taking steps to ensure that such students are able to word process, as part of their normal way of working.

Education

Question 01

Most students could identify at least one criticism of selecting by ability and were able to explain their criticism adequately to get the additional mark. Common responses made reference to disadvantaging different social groups, the late developer, lowering student self-esteem and the problems of measuring and defining intelligence. A number of responses also focused on how schools selected externally using an entrance exam or internally, by way of setting and streaming.

However, this question did create problems for some students. Less effective responses failed to focus on the 'by ability' element in the question and discussed schools selecting higher performing pupils by choice, rather than by testing ability. A significant number of responses failed to score any marks because they either did not identify a specific group that might be disadvantaged or instead outlined characteristics of the selection process, rather than a critiquing them. A number of students failed to gain a second mark by either not giving an adequate explanation of the criticism or by repeating their first explanation.

Question 02

The question produced a wide range of answers, with most students able to identify and explain at least two reasons. This question had the highest mean mark (79%), as a percentage of maximum mark. Common successful responses gave the examples of hierarchy, dress codes, attendance and punctuality, rewards and punishments and fragmentation of tasks. Students who wrote about the functions of schools from a theoretical perspective, without referring to a characteristic, were less successful. Many students were not awarded a second mark because they failed to give an example of how the characteristics of the school were mirrored in the workplace.

Question 03

The majority of students were able to explicitly refer to one or two ‘hooks’ from the Item. The hooks that were most commonly used were concerned with the curriculum, teacher-pupil relationships and interaction with peers. The majority of students were able to apply at least one of these key hooks and then successfully link this to processes such as labelling, the use of language codes, subcultures and streaming and how it impacted on the pupil’s identity. Many of the successful responses also drew on the work of Bernstein, Bourdieu, Becker, Lacey and Archer and were able to use studies on pupil identity based on class, gender or ethnicity. Less successful responses mentioned students ‘feeling negative’ and often drifted into issues relating to achievement.

However, a minority of students were unable to refer to hooks from the item and wrote about labelling, streaming and pupil subcultures. Despite often giving a detailed knowledge of a process, these responses were unable to score beyond the 1-3 band. Many students found it difficult to relate the process to the appropriate hook, or had limited application to identity, so ended in the 4-7 band. Only a minority of answers were able to get into the 8-10 band by taking two hooks, explaining two processes and applying these to identity, through analysis and evaluation. Often attempts to evaluate were generic and so did not score well. More successful examples of evaluation were applied specifically to the question, such as identity being shaped by external factors, rather than processes in schools.

Question 04

Most students were able to demonstrate a range of external and internal factors that have an impact on differences in educational achievement between ethnic groups. The majority of students used the item to structure their answers, particularly focussing on “home and family life”, in terms of external factors and ideas around labelling to explore “factors within school”. Many students demonstrated clearly a large amount of conceptual knowledge and a significant number of studies that were accurately applied to the question, particularly the work of Sewell, Bereiter and Engelmann, Fuller, Mirza, Gillborn and Youdell and Archer. The large majority of students were able to get into the 13-18 mark band, and the mean mark for the question was ‘18’.

Stronger responses showed both breadth and depth of knowledge with a good range of concepts. Materials were presented analytically with explanations being unpacked. These responses typically identified specific ethnic groups, rather than applying an explanation to all ethnic minorities or to a supposed homogenous group such as ‘Asians’, and therefore were successful in highlighting which ethnic groups over-achieved and which ones underachieved. The very best answers contained specific evaluation and could identify and explain links between internal and external factors, for example in the way language crosses over from the home background to the school. However, only a minority of students mentioned that these factors could be interrelated and most that did failed to discuss explicitly how external and internal factors impacted on each other.

Less effective answers were often class-based rather than referring specifically to ethnicity. Some answers offered only highly generic material which was equally applicable to social class as to ethnicity, especially on material deprivation and labelling. Few responses were able to show the evaluation required for the very top band. Evaluation was often by juxtaposition, mainly of internal and external factors. Better evaluation occurred when students were critical throughout their answer, rather than giving a few instances of undeveloped points. The majority of students had conclusions that were not evaluative and were largely a recap of previous points, and so did not score well.

Methods in Context

Question 05

The majority of students appeared to be confident in their understanding of written questionnaires and could include a range of practical, ethical and theoretical issues relating to the method. Most students provided balanced answers which examined both strengths and weaknesses. Less effective answers were often relatively strong on their understanding of written questionnaires, but the strengths and limitations of the method were not applied effectively to either the issue or to the study of education in general. The significant number of students who focused on the method alone, even when this was done well, could get no higher than the 9-12 mark band, without making reference to the research issue.

A significant minority of students interpreted written questionnaires as 'open questions' and confused written questionnaires as being an interpretivist approach. They therefore incorrectly described the method as providing qualitative data with higher levels of depth and validity. A smaller minority seemed unsure about whether the method was a qualitative or quantitative one. There were also a larger number of students who wrote a 'catch all' conclusion which recapped previous points and referred to alternative methods and the need to triangulate. This type of conclusion tended to add little or nothing to the response.

The majority of students were able to make use of the Item, for example, by applying '*some questionnaires may not be returned*' to low response rate and '*completed outside the home*' to parents being able to complete them in their own time. However, the 'hook' of '*operationalising of concepts*' was less well applied, such as to the issue of it leading to a lack of validity in responses. With weaker responses, students just repeated sections of the item without any significant development.

The main limitation of many responses was not explicitly addressing the link to 'their children's achievement'. Most attempts at application to the issue stopped at the 'role of parents' although often implicitly referring to achievement by discussing parental involvement in their child's education. Many students focused on the differences between working-class and middle-class parents in relation to issues such as linguistic and literary skills, on parents' own experience of education, and on the likelihood of impression management as they represented themselves as 'good' parents.

However, very few responses offered one or more application of the method to the specific issue of the role of parents in pupils' achievement, for example in the way parents may give socially desirable responses that lack validity, such as ticking boxes stating that they 'strongly agree' with the statement that they are very involved in helping their child achieve in school. It was good to see that a large number of students were able to advance characteristics of the method such as access and development of a gatekeeper issue beyond education in general. However, few students were able to apply a characteristic of the role of parents in pupils' achievement to the method of written questionnaires to reach the requirements of the top band.

Theory and Methods

Question 06

The wide range of responses to this question ranged from non-responses to a sustained examination of two disadvantages of using personal documents in sociological research. The majority of students were however able to present two reasonable disadvantages. Common

answers included reference to difficulties with access, interpretation and invasion of privacy. The best answers showed a clear knowledge of the method and were able to apply studies such as Thomas and Znaniecki, Aries and Hey, and/or refer to particular forms of personal documents. Weaker answers were able to apply examples, particularly of diaries, but leaned towards a discussion on the characteristics of a personal document, rather than a criticism.

However, many students performed less well on this question than on the rest of the paper. Few were able to develop points with a depth of understanding, analysis and application, which explains why it had the lowest mean as a percentage of maximum mark (51%). In addition to the issue of timing, this appeared to be due to some students lacking confidence in answering a question on this method. Many students struggled to fully develop their disadvantages, often listing several examples to compensate for their lack of analysis. Some also wrote about general disadvantages of qualitative data, particularly positivist criticisms, without specifically applying their answer to personal documents. A small number confused personal with public documents.

Centres are reminded that there are no marks for evaluation for this question. A significant number of students had specific evaluative statements regarding the strengths of personal documents that were 'tagged on' to the end of responses that were not awardable.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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