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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel

GCE Psychology 9PS0/01

Paper 1: Foundations in Psychology

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Introduction

The examination structure provided a range of question types over the five sections, with the final extended responses requiring candidates to address issues and debates. Most candidates demonstrated psychological knowledge and understanding in this examination.

Candidates attempted most of the questions on this paper, however the essay-based responses were limited and some students did not fully understand the skills required.

Strengths were seen in the understanding of the learning theories topic and the ability to apply knowledge and understanding to a source, extracting relevant application points.

Whilst there was appropriate AO2 points made within the learning theories essay this was not maintained throughout the paper. Students found this skill challenging to demonstrate in the smaller mark questions. Some students are giving generic answers that are not applied to the context, for example not linking to the netball teams in Q3 or just simply referring to "David" in Q9a and Q9b.

Candidates completed the mathematical based skills questions Q2a, Q7a, Q7b, however there was some confusion over the answer to Q2b, students in some cases calculated scores rather than simply stating the measure of central tendency. Q7a caused some problems however many candidates were able to calculate the difference between the two conditions, there still remains some confusion over how to determine the level of significance from statistical tests.

Candidate responses to the Issues and Debates section were more often limited. Q15 students struggled to identify how learning theories have changed over time. Most could identify one theory but found the AO3 element of the essay challenging.

The remainder of this Examiner Report will focus on each individual question and specific examples with the aim of highlighting areas of good practice and some common errors which can be used to help prepare candidates for future 9PS0/01 examinations.

Question 1a

This was an AO2 question where candidates were required to describe why the students ignored their teacher and continued to talk. Candidates were required to apply their knowledge of social impact theory to achieve marks on this question. Common strong answers pulled features from the scenario such as "29 students, and only one teacher". Where students did not achieve well, some became confused between agency theory and social impact theory or gave a generic response without consideration of the stimulus.

The candidate achieved one mark. They have applied their response to the number of students in the class, however the second point is not elaborated in context to the source.

Question 2a

This was an AO2 maths skills question the command verb "identify" requires some key information to be selected from a given stimulus/resource (specification page 94). The candidates were not required to calculate a score or identify the data points. The identify command verb wanted the students to apply the appropriate terminology. Many students failed to achieve the marks for this question.

Question 2b

This question was assessing AO2 understanding about what can be interpreted from the scenario. Many candidates struggled to make a conclusion from the data presented as they hadn't fully understood the first part of the question. Some students merely described the data shown in the graph therefore achieved 0 marks rather than suggesting that most drivers did not exceed the speed limit of the town.

Question 3

This question was assessing AO2 application of candidates' understanding of realistic conflict theory to the scenario of the netball teams and their supporters. Many responses were generic, where candidates did not link each point to the source material, or that they repeated the same point multiple times therefore scoring the first time but not gaining credit after this. In a small number of responses candidates related their answer to social impact theory. This of course is an explanation of obedience rather than prejudice.

Question 4

This was an evaluate AO1/AO3 question where students were required to evaluate the contemporary study they had been taught. Candidates were required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the study and evaluate the specific elements of the study, namely the reliability and validity of the study. There were some strong evaluations of the most common response which was Burger (2009) – however there were some students who identified the study as Burger but then went onto describe Milgram's original experiment. There were a number of students who demonstrated some misconceptions within their evaluation, many students employed the GRAVE analysis technique however the question only required the validity and reliability. The inaccuracies

often limited the awarding of higher marks on the question for a number of candidates.

Question 5

This was an AO2 question where candidates were required to describe one aspect of the working memory model in relation to the scenario. Like with previous questions some candidates only attempted the link by using the name 'Becca' rather than remembering the names and locations of the human anatomy or her test. Where students achieved one mark it was often due to limited descriptions of their chosen aspect of the model. Errors here were rare, usually confusion arising by using the multi-store model to aid Becca's memory.

Question 6a

This was an AO1 question where students were required to describe 'semantic memory' as identified by Tulving (1972). Most candidates achieved both marks here. Where students did not achieve both the marks this was often due to them only defining the semantic memory and not including an example as had been requested in the question. The most common example was to identify that Paris was the capital of France.

Question 6b

This was an AO1 and AO3 question where candidates were required to explain a strength of Tulving's (1972) explanation of long-term memory. The AO1 mark was awarded for the student's identification of a strength of the theory and the second mark for AO3 was for the justification of this strength.

Most students showed some understanding of the general strengths of the study, however others gave generic non-specific strengths that could be applied to most theories such as "having experimental support". The better students justified the strength they had given making reference to research such as Ostergaard or Blakemore.

Question 7a

This was an AO2 mathematics question where candidates were required to calculate the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test for the given study. Most students attempted this question which was good to see. Many however only gained one of the marks for the completion of the difference column. Errors were then seen when completing the ranks, some students awarding a rank for the 0 difference, which subsequently gave the wrong totals which had an impact on gaining the correct value of T.

Question 7b

Where errors were seen in the determination of significance it was usually as a result of miscalculating the T- value or using the wrong value for N. In some cases some students used the p value of 0.05 rather than the 0.025 as directed in the question.

Question 8

This was an AO1 and AO3 assess question requiring students to make a judgement whether case studies are effective for investigating memory. Student responses tended to rely very heavily on describing and evaluating the case studies of Henry Molaison, rather than describing the features of case studies and then making the assessment of their use in terms of memory. Due to the errors made, this often limited the engagement in the higher levels of response therefore many students could not reach levels 3 and 4. In future series it would be nice to see students drawing upon the key features of the research method such as using scans or that they are undertaken over a long period of time. This duration of a case study could then be linked the long term use of memory investigations with Alzheimer's patients for example.

Question 9a

Like the previous question 1 this is assessing AO2 application of students understanding of evolution and natural selection to the scenario of David's aggression. Many responses here were generic, where students presented their knowledge of evolution and natural selection but did not use it to link to why David reacted to the man in the restaurant. Most students gave generic descriptions of evolution and did not achieve significant marks on this question. There were few students who used an incorrect theory which was good to see.

Question 9b

This was an AO2 and AO3 question where students were required to explain one weakness of the role evolution and natural selection plays in David's aggression. Some students provided generic non-specific identifications of the weakness such as "there are other reasons for aggression". Here this is an example of generic answers as it could apply to other theories of behaviour and that it is not linked to the source. Stronger responses focussed on suggested that David's behaviour was learned from those around him rather than being biological. This then went into either social learning theory or operant conditioning.

Question 10

This is an AO2 question and therefore must link to the scenario of Lauren's research. Most students understood that the question required the method of her correlation. Some students made some errors by suggesting an experimental method of a difference between a hungry group and recently eaten group. As this suggests a difference between the conditions it was not appropriate for the correlation. Many students scored at least half marks on this question. Common responses suggested Lauren could gather an opportunity sample around the campus from locations such as café's and outside lecture theatres and ask give questionnaires that featured a Likert scale response to rate hunger and aggression.

Question 11

This was an AO1 and AO3 question where students were required to give an extended response to evaluate Freud's psychodynamic explanation of aggression. Many students struggled with this question, most writing everything they could remember about Freud's theory rather than how the theory explains aggression. Students struggled on both skills in this extended response question. Many responses focussed on the psychosexual stages rather than defence mechanisms or catharsis. The AO3 points tended to be weak or missing, like with previous responses there was the comments such as "other approaches explain aggression differently", but did not provide how the theories differ or missed the opportunity for comparison. There was little evidence of logical chains of reasoning in the essays – many just providing a list like selection of generic points.

Question 12

This was an AO2 application question and the responses were required to be applied to Arthur and his fear. Students approached this question well with many scoring at least half marks. Where students did not get the full marks on offer this was generally due to the identification of the conditioned response (CR). Many students identified that the response was crying. Had this included "crying because of fear" this would have been awarded credit but crying in isolation was not appropriate.

Question 13a

This was an AO2 question that required students to reflect on the practical undertaken as part of their learning. Some students provided responses that were not appropriate for the learning theories topic as they were experimental rather than observational. In this instance there were no unethical practical's described in the responses. Some students struggled to put enough detail into their response. The highest achieving thinking carefully about how they carried

out each stage of their research such as when it took place, what data was tallied etc. A small number of students stated they replicated Pavlov's famous experiment. This was deemed out of an A-Level students capabilities due to ethics, resources and time.

Question 13b

This was an AO2 and AO3 question where students were required to identify and justify an improvement to their practical investigation. There were some generic responses to this that just related to improving observations rather than the practical however these were rare and students generally scored some marks. Students were better at identifying an improvement rather than justifying why this was necessary. The better responses went beyond simply increasing the sample size to actually thinking about the impact – such as varying the times of the day or in the case of people's responses to animals in a zoo, thinking about different times of year when the zoo displayed themed animals such as Halloween. The strongest answers clearly understood the purpose for making an improvement. Very few students made "improvements" that would make the practical unethical however some did choose to make an improvement by turning the observation into an experiment.

Question 14

This was an AO1 and AO2 discuss question that required students to demonstrate an equal emphasis between knowledge and understanding of systematic desensitisation and application to the scenario of Astrid in their answer. Many were able to make links to the general concept of systematic desensitisation but in a limited manner to the process of the therapy and steps associated with successful treatment. The students picked up elements of the scenario and these had been highlighted or underlined on the paper to show that they realised the importance of including specific references to the source. The better students acknowledged that the wedding was in the future therefore the time Astrid would need to invest in the treatment would be appropriate.

Question 15

This was an AO1 and AO3 assess question drawing upon how learning theories have changed over time. Students struggled with this question. Most just identified one theory. The responses tended to use classical conditioning and the work of Pavlov rather than thinking logically about when the theories were published and how their explanations of behaviour differed. Students provided some brief AO1 point however the AO3 element was challenging – students found it difficult to link as to how the learning theory has been used differently over time. This could have been done by applying to explanations of phobias, reward systems for changing behaviour in children or the role that models play

in the acquisition of behaviour. Students could have drawn ideas from a range of situations to demonstrate their broader knowledge and understanding.

Question 16

This was an AO1 and AO3 evaluate question, weaker students struggled with the concept of social control especially having to draw their knowledge from social and biological psychology. There are many examples that students could draw upon however the most common was the role of obedience in social control – students very rarely used research other than Milgram to explain their points in this question, therefore the AO3 responses for this item were not strong.

It was surprising to see minimal references to the biological approach in student's responses. Students could have used the previous questions to give them a hint about aggression and therefore could have linked this to the Raine et al research which would have put the responses higher in the levels rather than being in level 1 due to not fully developing the demands of the questions.

Blank pages were seen here, and students may have been short of time for this item. They may benefit from guidance that the larger essay is at the end of the paper and that the paper requires careful time management.

Recommendations for future students

Based on this unusual series and paper students may consider the following;

- Ensure that the paper has been practiced under timed conditions and how they balance their knowledge across different topics. Some students have spent more time on the short answer questions rather than providing enough time for the extended response question.
- Students should be aware of the demands of the different command verbs and assessment objectives. By doing this they will avoid making generic points for AO2 questions and also the confusion between identify and calculate.
- Students should review the issues and debates elements of their topic areas as these will be examined on this paper.
- Where students are making evaluative justification points it is important that they fully develop their idea using the relevant research or theory rather than stating there is evidence to support it.
- Students should understand the levels of significance and be able to justify why a value has been chosen. They should be reminded that on each of the statistical tables at the front of the examination booklet there is information about the critical and calculated values.