General Certificate of Education

Sociology 1191

SCLY2   Education with Research Methods;
Health with Research Methods

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

This Report on the Examination uses the new numbering system

SCLY2

Rubric

It appears that a few candidates found the rubric difficult to follow and consequently answered either the whole paper or parts of both Sections A and B. This is somewhat surprising given that the two sections are clearly identified and that candidates are instructed to answer questions from only one section. Nevertheless, this reinforces the importance of teachers explaining the rubric of this paper to candidates before the examination.

Timing seemed to be a problem for some candidates, with evidence of the last question on methods (ie either Question 3 or Question 6) being rushed. A sizeable minority of candidates used bullet points in this answer or offered brief responses, implying time-management problems.

Section A: Education with Research Methods

Education

01 Some candidates had little or no idea of what is meant by 'compensatory' education. Some misinterpreted the question as relating to compulsory or comprehensive education. Answers that were confined to an example received one mark, as did those that only partially explained the concept.

02 Most candidates scored either 4 or 6 marks on this question. Popular answers included reference to inability to afford books or computers, lack of workspace at home and inadequate diet. Some candidates lost marks by offering overlapping factors as separate points, for example, suggesting a lack of books and a lack of computers as separate factors. Cultural factors were also frequently stated, which suggests that the distinction between cultural and material is not clear to many candidates.

03 This question generated a wide range of responses covering the whole mark range. Most candidates displayed at least some basic understanding of pupil subcultures. In many cases, candidates showed good knowledge of labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectations but without explicitly linking this knowledge to pupil subcultures. This resulted in generalised answers that strayed into the effects on pupil achievement rather than on the creation of pupil subcultures. Some candidates could list different types of pupil subcultures, often drawing on Sewell or Woods. Where differentiation occurred, this was more often a simple categorisation into pro- and anti-school subcultures.

Stronger responses identified a range of pupil subcultures and offered some developed explanations of why they exist. Labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy, streaming/setting, and home background factors were often discussed. The very best answers – some of which gained maximum marks – outlined a range of explanations of different subcultures and, in some cases, offered a brief critique of these explanations. Top mark band responses were characterised by the way in which explanations were explicitly connected to the existence of different pupil subcultures.

04 Many candidates began their answer with reference to Item A. Weaker responses did not go very far beyond the main points in the Item and consequently remained in the bottom mark band. Some candidates appeared to have little understanding of the notion of value consensus; this limited their ability to apply their knowledge effectively.

More effective answers presented a sound account of the functions of education, often juxtaposing functionalist and Marxist views. However, such answers often got lost in the detail of these views and failed to relate their knowledge to the issue of value consensus.

The best answers displayed a clear understanding of value consensus and applied their knowledge of different sociological views of the functions of education. Although many relied only on functionalist and Marxist approaches, a sizable number of candidates at this level made effective use of feminist theory and, in fewer cases, of New Right views. A few candidates produced very good answers but failed to make use of Item A, thus limiting their access to the top mark band.

Methods in Context

05

Many candidates found this a challenging question. Virtually all candidates, however, recognised that this was a 'methods in context' question and very few offered only an account of sociological explanations of teachers' attitudes towards minority ethnic group pupils. Those that did remained, for the most part, in the bottom mark band.

Many candidates offered a methods-based answer that was 'context-free'. Responses of this kind made no attempt to apply knowledge of the selected method to the study of education in general or the specific issue of teachers' attitudes. This form of response remained in the lower part of the middle mark band and even the best of such answers did not get past half marks. To get to this level required appropriate use of concepts and some understanding of relevant methodological issues.

Candidates who were better prepared could link their chosen method to the study of education in general. This usually took the form of identifying some of the particular research characteristics of teachers and, less often, of pupils and classrooms/schools. Better versions of this type of response applied the strengths and limitations of the chosen method to these characteristics.

The strongest responses were able to take this one step further and relate some of the selected method's strengths and weaknesses to the study of the particular issue of teachers' attitudes towards minority ethnic group pupils. For example, some candidates discussed the pressure on teachers to maintain a professional role image when being observed, or discussed the likelihood of being able to carry out covert observation in school settings. Others discussed issues relating to pupils' identifying researchers with authority figures, or issues of the ethnicity of researchers. Some candidates discussed the anonymity of questionnaires as a benefit for studying a sensitive issue such as teacher racism and as a disadvantage when used with younger pupils, eg in relation to respondents' problems with understanding questions or taking them seriously.

A few candidates discussed both methods, which could constitute a rubric infringement if the answer appeared to be presented as two separate accounts. A small number of candidates discussed methods other than those specified.

Overall, the range and distribution of responses to this question highlights the urgent need for centres to develop candidates' application skills.

Research Methods

06   Most candidates had a fairly clear idea of the meaning of 'triangulation' and offered an appropriate explanation. A few candidates seemed to be still in an education frame of mind and referred to the tripartite system.

07   Most candidates offered an appropriate disadvantage of longitudinal studies, usually drawn from time, cost, or sample attrition. Candidates found it more difficult to identify an advantage of longitudinal studies (eg to study change over time). A minority of candidates did not seem to be aware of the characteristics of longitudinal studies.

08   This was generally well answered, with many candidates identifying disadvantages such as lack of reliability, time-consuming, straying into irrelevant areas, problems of categorisation etc.   A few candidates misread the question and offered disadvantages of structured interviews.

09   There was evidence of candidate fatigue in responding to this question. A sizeable minority of candidates appeared to experience time-management problems which resulted in short or bullet-pointed answers.

Less effective answers often simply listed a few disadvantages of official statistics with limited development. Some answers focused more on the ways in which official statistics are created; this would often drift into a tangential discussion of questionnaires. Stronger answers offered a more substantial list of disadvantages, related these to concepts such as validity, and offered an interpretivist critique usually focusing on the social construction of official statistics. Responses of this quality also often made reference to examples of official statistics, usually the Census, and highlighted the political dimensions of official statistical data.

A common failing was for candidates to convert this question into a task of 'assess the strengths and limitations'. As a consequence, such answers presented both strengths and limitations in fairly equal proportions, which reduced the relevance of part of their content. Given the limited time a sizeable minority of candidates had left themselves, answers taking this approach often contained only a few rewardable points. More effective answers used the strengths of official statistics to counterpoint a stated disadvantage, thus providing a specific evaluation.

Section B: Health with Research Methods

Health

10 There seemed to be a centre-based response to this question; candidates either knew or did not know the meaning of this term. Those who were aware of the inverse care law for the most part explained it accurately.

11 This was generally answered well. Most candidates suggested at least two cultural/behavioural factors with diet, alcohol, drug use and exercise being commonly cited. Some candidates strayed into material factors such as poverty. This suggests that the distinction between cultural and material factors is not clear in some candidate's minds.

12 This question generated a wide range of responses covering the whole mark range. Most candidates displayed at least a basic understanding of some reasons for ethnic differences in access to health care although in some cases the sociological material presented was quite thin.

In many cases, candidates showed sound knowledge of language and cultural issues. Some candidates made reference to the relationship between ethnicity and social class. In some cases, this became a 'class proxy' answer, while in others the link was clearly explained. The former approach often strayed into less relevant areas and was not as well-rewarded as the latter approach.

In stronger answers, candidates either developed these issues or made reference to additional factors such as racism, institutional racism and complementary and alternative medicine. The very best answers often outlined a range of reasons for ethnic differences in access to health care and, in some cases, offered a brief critique of these explanations. Top mark band responses were also characterised by the way in which explanations were explicitly connected to ethnicity.

13 Many candidates began their answer with reference to Item C. Weaker responses did not go very far beyond the main points in the Item and consequently remained in the bottom mark band.

More effective answers presented a sound account of some of the explanations of gender differences in health chances and health care. In many cases at this level of response, coverage of both aspects was imbalanced. In some cases the distinction between health chances and health care was not explicit.

The best answers displayed a clear understanding of explanations of gender differences in both aspects indicated in the question. Issues such as patriarchy, the medicalisation of childbirth, mental health, and the use of GP services often figured, as did structural, artefact and biological explanatory frameworks. A few candidates produced very good answers but failed to make use of Item C thus limiting their access to the top mark band.

Methods in Context

14

Many candidates found this a challenging question. Virtually all candidates, however, recognised that this was a 'methods in context' question and very few offered only an account of sociological explanations of social class inequalities in health. Those that did remained, for the most part, in the bottom mark band.

Many candidates offered a methods-based answer that was 'context-free'. Responses of this kind made no attempt to apply knowledge of the selected method to the study of health in general or the specific issue of social class inequalities in health. This form of response remained in the lower part of the middle mark band and even the best of such answers did not get past half marks. To get to this level required appropriate use of concepts and some understanding of relevant methodological issues.

Candidates who were better prepared could link their chosen method to the study of health in general. This usually took the form of identifying some of the particular research characteristics of patients and, less often, of medical professionals and health settings. Better versions of this type of response applied the strengths and limitations of the chosen method to these characteristics.

The strongest responses were able to take this one step further and relate some of the selected method's strengths and weaknesses to the study of the particular issue of social class inequalities in health. For example, some candidates discussed the difficulties associated with defining and measuring social class or discussed the importance of being able to obtain large-scale data on this issue. Other issues included the under- or over-reporting of behaviour choices or social class issues and the language used in questionnaires.

A few candidates discussed both methods, which could constitute a rubric infringement if the answer appeared to be presented as two separate accounts. A small number of candidates discussed methods other than those specified.

Overall, the range and distribution of responses to this question highlights the urgent need for centres to develop candidates' application skills.

Research Methods

15　Most candidates had a fairly clear idea of the meaning of 'triangulation' and offered an appropriate explanation.

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17　This was generally well answered with many candidates identifying disadvantages such as lack of reliability, time-consuming, straying into irrelevant areas, problems of categorisation etc. A few candidates misread the question and offered disadvantages of structured interviews.

18 There was evidence of candidate fatigue in responding to this question. A sizeable minority of candidates appeared to experience time-management problems which resulted in short or bullet-pointed answers.

Less effective answers often simply listed a few advantages of participant observation with limited development. Some answers failed to differentiate between forms of participant observation or drifted into descriptions of particular studies that have used this method. Many candidates presented validity and reliability either incorrectly or as interchangeable concepts.

Stronger answers offered a more substantial list of advantages of participant observation, related these to concepts such as validity, and offered an interpretivist methodological location for this method. Responses of this quality also often made effective use of examples of studies that have used participant observation

A common failing was for candidates to convert this question into a task of 'assess the strengths and limitations'. As a consequence, such answers presented both strengths and limitations in fairly equal proportions, which reduced the relevance of part of their content. Given the limited time a sizeable minority of candidates had left themselves, answers taking this approach often contained only a few rewardable points. More effective answers used the disadvantages of participant observation to counterpoint a stated advantage, thus providing a specific evaluation.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.