Item A

According to some sociologists, cultural factors are the most important cause of social class differences in education achievement. In their view, there are deep-rooted differences between working-class and middle-class subcultures. For example, they argue that working-class subculture encourages fatalism and collectivism, whereas middle-class subculture encourages individuals to be achievement orientated. Such subcultural differences originate in the home, but they are reinforced through peer groups. However, critics claim that the importance of cultural factors has been overstated. Instead, they argue that material factors in pupils’ home background are the key to understanding class differences in achievement.

**Q: Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess the importance of cultural factors in causing social class difference in achievement. (30)**

Cultural factors play a huge part in causing social class differences in educational achievement, these factors include things such as cultural deprivation and capital which stem from a young age and influence achievement.

Cultural deprivation refers to being deprived of basic norms, values, attitudes, language and experiences needed to do well in school. Middle class are the type that typically are not culturally deprived as from a young age middle class parents would read intellectual books, buy educational toys and take their children to theatres etc. Research by sociologists has been carried out distributing 450 questionnaires to pupils over four schools to test cultural deprivation. The questionnaires asked questions about reading and TV viewing habits. The conclusion was that those that read complex fiction and watched documentaries for example developed a greater vocabulary and knowledge, thus doing better in school. However, working class parents often can’t support their children in the same way due to material deprivation, and therefore their children are more culturally deprived, this clearly shows that cultural factors are a main cause for social class differences in educational achievement.

Use of language between different social classes is also under cultural deprivation and can cause educational achievement differences. Bernstein distinguishes between two speech codes that he associates with two social classes, one being the restricted code, which he commonly associates with the working class where they use one word answers or hand gestures to communicate. By contrast the elaborated code which he associates with middle class used complete, more complex and grammatical sentences, clearly serving them better than working class in education.

Differing attitudes and values is also a cause of class difference in achievement and is a type of cultural deprivation. Sugarman identifies four attitudes and values that differ between working and middle class. “Fatalism” is where working class claim ‘whatever will be, will be’ attitude, middle oppose this with working hard to get good results. “Collectivism” where working class value being part of a group, whereas the middle class refuse to be held back by group loyalties. Immediate gratification where working class pupils seek rewards now without work, by contrast middle classes ‘deferred gratification’ refers to working hard now for rewards later eg revising for exams. Finally present time orientation, where working class see the present as more important than the future, middle class disagree. These differing attitudes show clearly how cultural factors can affect achievement between the two social classes.

However, Keddie rejects the cultural deprivation theory, claiming it is a myth, and that people are not culturally deprived, just culturally different.

Bordieu identifies another reason for class differences, cultural capital. He claims middle class parents can choose better schools for their children by distinguishing two main types of choosers, privileged-skilled choosers and semi-skilled choosers, Privileged-skilled choosers are typically middle class who have strong connection with the school and respect their values. By contrast, semi-skilled choosers have a lower connection and not as much interest.

Despite Keddie’s claim, overall it is clear that from a young age, cultural factors such as attitudes, language and capital play a huge part in educational achievement between social classes, as supported with evidence by Bernstein, Sugarman and Bordieu.

However as Item A states, some sociologists ‘argue that material factors’ may be the main causes, these factors include housing, diet and health, family income etc.