

70/70

AQA A level Education with Theory and Methods Summer Practice Paper

- 1) Outline 2 material factors that may affect social class differences in educational achievement (4 marks)

One material factor that may affect social class differences in educational achievement is the home environment of the pupil. Pupils from working class families may have smaller homes with less space and peace and quiet to study than middle class pupils. This may mean that educational achievement is more likely for middle class students. Waldfogel and Washbrook support this by suggesting that children from low income families are more likely to live in crowded accommodation making studying more difficult. Another factor is the hidden cost of state schooling. Low income families may not be able to afford educational resources, books and school trips, therefore the lower class may achieve less than the middle class children in education. This is supported by findings from the Aviva Family Finances report 2013, which showed that the average cost of sending a child to state school is £1614 per year.

2  
2  
Bit long for a 4 mark.

- 2) Outline 3 reasons why government education policies aimed at raising educational achievement among disadvantaged groups may not always succeed (6 marks)

One reason is that organisations such as schools may not use funding or resources from the policies in the way that the government intended them to be used. The Pupil Premium policy meant that schools would receive money per pupil from a disadvantaged background. This money was supposed to help those disadvantaged pupils and act as an incentive for schools to take on disadvantaged pupils and have the resources to help them. However Ofsted found that this money is not spend on those that it is supposed to help and only 1 in 10 head teachers said that it made a significant change in how they supported disadvantaged pupils. Another reason is that there are multiple factors affecting achievement for disadvantaged pupils and although one factor may be addressed through government policy, another factor may mean that the policy has no effect. For example in 1988 parents were given the right to send their child to a school of their choice, arguably encouraging parentocracy. However Sharon Gerwitz argues that the amount of choice involved in selecting a school is limited by the ability of parents to discriminate between schools. Disconnected choosers who are likely to be of working class status consider the closest schools and therefore may send their child to a lower achieving school where they are less able to fulfil their potential. Another reason why government education policy may not always succeed in raising educational achievement among disadvantaged groups is that they may have unintended consequences that are counter-productive. For example Comprehensive schools were introduced to make education more meritocratic and counteract class inequality caused by the tripartite system. However they maintained this inequality due to setting and streaming students, sometimes putting working class students in lower sets and streams no matter what their grades are.

2  
2  
2

- 3) Applying material from Item A, analyse two reasons why pupils from some minority ethnic groups achieve above average results in school.

One reason why pupils from some minority ethnic groups achieve above average results in school is that Indian and Chinese students are less likely to live in poverty and are more likely to be middle class. This may be why, as stated in the item, Chinese and Indian pupils outperform white pupils at GCSE. Bourdieu may argue that as they are middle class, they possess the same cultural capital as the school, giving them an immediate advantage in their chances of success at GCSE. Sullivan argues also that the middle class have greater aspirations and resources, therefore middle class Indian and Chinese students have a greater advantage to working class pupils. As they are less likely to live in poverty, they are less likely to live in cramped and crowded conditions which as suggested by Waldfogel and Washbrook is a contributing factor to failing education. However two fifths of those in ethnic minority groups were living in poverty in 2012, which suggests that this is not the only reason that Asian students outperform white pupils as some do live in poverty. Another reason why ethnic minority pupils achieve above average results in school is that working class Black and Asian parents are more successful at getting their children to stay on after GCSEs than white working class parents. This suggests that ethnic minority groups are more motivated by their parents to succeed throughout their education. This might be why, as stated in the item, Chinese pupils do better than white pupils even if the Chinese pupils are on free school meals and the white pupils are not. This evidence shows that class may not be a primary factor in the difference in educational achievement between students of different ethnicities. However Bhatti suggests that Asian parents are not very supportive and are not always aware of how the schooling process works. Therefore another factor may be causing the difference such as teachers setting and streaming Asian pupils into higher sets based on stereotypes.

good analysis

Excellent

- 4) Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that gender differences in both subject choice and educational achievement are mainly the result of the influence of wider society.

As Item B states, in each stage of education girls tend to do better than boys. As well as this there are major gender divides in terms of A level subject choice and choice of vocational courses. This may be down to a number of external factors which involve how wider society has influenced girls and boys to make the choices they do and as to how they perform throughout education such as maturity. This may be why as stated in the item, girls are more likely to be able to write their name on entering primary school than boys. However other sociologists would argue that internal factors, factors present within the school, such as labelling are the reason for the gender divide. This is shown in the item by the fact that boys are more likely to be assessed by their schools as having special education needs. Teachers maybe labelling male pupils as less able.

Society may have influenced girls to outperform boys in education through the impact of feminism such as the instalment of the Sex Discrimination Act. Feminism

has caused girls attitudes and aspirations to change, motivating them to succeed in education. Girls may now feel a sense of empowerment from this shift. McRobbie's study of girls magazines supports this idea. In the 1970s the emphasis in these magazines was on marriage and kids, however in 1994 the emphasis had shifted to independence and careers. This shift in ambition is also shown by Sharpe who found that in 1976 girls priorities were to get married and have kids. However in 1994 girls priorities were having a career and being financially independent. For example learning to write earlier than boys may be due to girls increased ambition and the encouragement from parents, making them better at language. However male-female differences in A level language exam results are small. Another factor affecting the gender difference in achievement is maturity. It is argued that girls mature earlier and therefore are better organised with work such as coursework, which requires good organization. This may be the reason for the improvements in girls GCSE grades when the introduction of coursework based assessment was introduced. However the relationship between physical and intellectual maturity is unclear, meaning this explanation lacks validity. However maturity may be the reason for why as stated in the item, girls are more likely to be able to write their own name in primary school than boys.

Mitsos +  
Browne

There are more wider society factors that cause boys to underachieve. An example of this is primary socialisation. Boys and girls are often socialised differently and grow up to have varying opinions about school. Hannan argues that boys relate to peers by 'doing' and girls relate to peers by talking. This may be due to how they were socialised which would explain why girls are at an advantage as school is focussed on language skills. However as explained before, the difference between male and female results in A level language exams is small. Oakley suggests that girls are manipulated into being submissive meaning perhaps they work more because they are more obedient, thus meaning that they get better grades. However it is important to note that gender cannot be separated from class as shown by middle class girls getting better GCSE results than working class girls. Gender and class are likely to have a combined affect on a student's educational performance. Another factor causing boys to underachieve is hegemonic masculinity. This is where boys have a dominant idea of masculinity which consists of being tough and acting up. This creates conflict between the boy and the school which may be why, as stated in the item, boys are more likely to be assessed for having special needs.

Excellent

As stated in the item, society may have also had an effect on subject choice as there are major gender differences between choices at A level and vocational courses. Children may have been socialised by being exposed to gender stereotypes and being told which activities boys do and which activities girls do. For example Best found that gendered stereotyping occurred in children's books, with women more likely to be in domestic roles. This may lead female students away from science and maths at A level as they are not associated with skills needed for domestic work. Another factor is biological differences between genders. It is suggested that females have genetically determined linguistic advantages which has been associated with the improvement in female GCSE results after coursework assessment was introduced. However it can be argued that psycho-biological explanations tend to be offered as total explanations and falter by not considering the changing historical pattern of educational success. Gendered career opportunities may also have an effect on subject choice. For example over half of all women's employment is either



clerical, secretarial, personal services or domestic work. This means women will choose A level subjects and vocational courses such as secretarial courses, because that will benefit them when they leave school to work. Radical feminists would argue that girls are exposed to stereotypes of women, leading them to choose particular careers and subjects. For example they argue that women are underrepresented in history and science, which may cause girls to not choose to study these subjects.

Although there are strong arguments for how wider society has affected the gender gap in educational achievement and gender subject choices, some sociologists such as Interactionists would argue that internal factors explain the gender gap and have more of an effect than wider society does.

For example the reason for girls outperforming boys in school may actually be due to having positive role models within the school instead of the impact of feminism. Teaching is a highly dominated field with 86% of headteachers being female in 2012. These positive role models inspire girls as they identify with them, and go on to be successful. However Jones argues that while schools are often female dominated, male teachers are more likely to be head teacher. Jones argues that males have a 1 in 4 chance of being head, whilst females have a 1 in 13 chance. Boys underachievement may not be due to hegemonic masculinity as much as labelling is the cause. As states in the item, boys are more likely to be assessed for having special needs and this may be due to teachers labelling them based on the fact that they are male. For example Swann found that girls interactions with teachers are more positive and boys interrupted more and were more disruptive. Teachers may associate interrupting and disruption with a lack of ability and negatively label boys as the non-ideal pupil. This can lead to boys being placed in lower sets and streams or not being given as much attention as girls as teachers believe girls can achieve more.

The difference in gendered subject choice can also be explained by external factors. For example students may pick certain subjects due to bullying and peer pressure rather than because of gendered career opportunities. This is supported by Dewar who found that female students were called lesbians if they were interested in sport. However the peer pressure imposed may stem from gender socialisation that students were exposed to in wider society.

Wider society issues are likely to have an effect on subject choice and the gender divide in achievement due to factors such as feminism, hegemonic masculinity and primary socialisation. However this argument fails to consider important internal school factors such as teacher labelling and role models within the school. It is likely that both external and internal factors have a combined effect on girls and boys and there are multiple factors that need to be taken into account when discussing the reason for girls achieving more than boys.

Excellent response.

5) Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using unstructured interviews to investigate streaming.

Unstructured interviews are an informal type of interview which adapts the style of a natural conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. There are no pre-set questions and no coded answers, thus producing qualitative data. Interpretivist sociologists would favour this method as it tends to produce in depth data that is high in validity. This method may be used to investigate streaming in schools as, as stated in the item, they are useful for investigating sensitive subjects such as students being labelled and streamed according to their ethnicity or class.

A practical strength of using unstructured interviews is that due to the time it takes to carry them out, they often require small samples. This is useful as it saves time and effort in trying to collect a large sample of participants. This would be useful when investigating streaming in schools because, as stated in the item, some pupils and teachers may refuse to be interviewed, therefore a large sample may be hard to gain. However there are many practical issues with using unstructured interviews to investigate streaming. Access would be an issue as pupils would be young and the school has a duty to protect them. Also the school may not want streaming to be investigated as it may reflect badly on them once the data is published. Therefore a method such as a questionnaire may be more suitable as it does not involve the researcher coming into contact with students one on one. Another issue is that the researcher has to have good interpersonal skills and needs to be sensitive to the participant if they want to gain in depth valid data. This may require training which costs time and money. This may be an issue especially with students who may not want to share personal information with an unknown adult as they may think what they say will be told to the school and they will get in trouble. If the students think that the researcher is working with the school, they may not be trusted. This would be an issue particularly when investigating anti-school subcultures. good

An ethical advantage to the use of unstructured interviews is that vulnerable groups such as children are able to be investigated in a respectful and effective manner. Students may have strong opinions about streaming in their school and unstructured interviews allow them to be heard in depth. This may be a better option than using structured interviews which does not involve building rapport and may have leading questions favouring the opinions of the researcher. Another ethical advantage is that informed consent can be easily gained as the research is overt. However consent will likely be needed to be gained from the school, parents, teachers and students which may mean the research can not be carried out. The researcher would have to go through these gatekeepers to gain access to the students and they may not be willing to give consent. This is especially the case when it comes to streaming as teachers and schools do not want to come across badly and ruin their reputation as an educational institution.

A theoretical advantage of using unstructured interviews to investigate streaming is that the data gathered is likely to be high in validity. This is because participants are able to talk freely and do not have limited answers to choose from. Also the researcher is able to gain rapport with them allowing them to open up and share personal information. This is useful when studying streaming as the school may try and coerce the students to answer in a

certain way if they were carrying out a class questionnaire. Where as in a one on one interview they would be more likely to open up and be truthful. A theoretical disadvantage is that the data would not be very representative as unstructured interviews usually use smaller samples. Positivists would not use this method as it makes it difficult to generalise the findings to the whole of the target population, in this case being schools. In a school of a thousand pupils they may only interview a fraction and are therefore not getting a representative view about how different groups feel about streaming. The sample may be biased as it is so small, meaning certain ethnic groups and subcultures may not be interviewed. Positivists also would not like to use this method as it lacks reliability. There is no standardisation involved and there are no pre-set questions or answers meaning each interview cannot be repeated in the exact same way. This makes it hard to compare interviews. When investigating streaming the interviewer may direct the conversation to one topic in one interview and another in the next, providing an unreliable picture of the effect and presence of streaming in school.

Overall I think that unstructured interviews are a good method for investigating streaming as they would provide valid answers. If another method such as a questionnaire was completed in class, teachers could affect the students answers as they may not want to come across badly and ruin their reputation. However this method means access may be hard as schools may worry about what students and teachers would say, and how this would reflect on the school when published.

Excellent.