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# CHAPTER 1 EDUCATION

## 1 Class Differences in Achievement

### Key Issues

- ▶ What are the patterns of achievement in relation to social class?
- ▶ What is the role of different home background factors in causing class differences in achievement?
- ▶ How do factors and processes in schools contribute to these differences?

### Class patterns of achievement

Working-class pupils in general achieve less than middle-class pupils in education. Children of higher professionals are 2-3 times more likely than children of manual workers to get five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE, and about five times more likely to go to university. Sociologists have put forward a range of explanations, which can be divided into:

- ▶ **External or home background factors** that lie outside the school.
- ▶ **Internal factors** within the school and the education system.

### Achievement and home background

Class differences in pupils' home background may play a key role in causing differences in achievement. Home background includes many things, but these can be grouped into two different types of factor:

- ▶ **Cultural factors** These include class differences in norms and values acquired through socialisation, attitudes to education, speech codes etc.
- ▶ **Material factors** These are the physical necessities of life, such as adequate housing, diet and income.

### Cultural deprivation theory

The main cultural explanation for class differences in achievement is cultural deprivation theory.

- ▶ 'Culture' refers to all the norms, values, beliefs, skills and knowledge that a society or a group regards as important. This culture is transmitted to the next generation through socialisation.
- ▶ Different classes socialise their children differently and this may affect their achievement.
- ▶ According to cultural deprivation theory, some working-class parents fail to transmit the appropriate norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, skills etc – that is, the 'right' culture – needed for educational success.

#### Analysis

Distinguish clearly between these factors, but also explain how they can be linked.

#### Interpreting the question

Be very clear about these two terms, because questions sometimes ask you to define or give examples of one or other of them.

**Analysis**

Explaining how these three factors might be linked to each other will gain you marks.

**Analysis**

Explain the meaning of the two codes, and then explain why the elaborated code is used in education – e.g. ‘Textbooks use it because they don’t know who their readers are, so they have to spell out their meanings very explicitly in a way that will be understood ‘universally’ – i.e. by everyone’.

**Analysis**

This helps to explain why some working-class pupils (those with educated parents) do better than some middle-class pupils (those without educated parents).

**Evaluation**

Critics argue that working-class parents don’t attend parents’ evenings because they work longer hours, or because they feel inferior to the teachers – not because they aren’t interested in their children’s education.

Cultural deprivation theorists see three factors as responsible for working-class under-achievement: **language, parents’ education** and **working-class subculture**.

**Intellectual stimulation**

Working-class parents are less likely to give their children educational toys and activities that will stimulate their thinking and reasoning skills, and less likely to read to them. This affects their intellectual development so that when they begin school they are at a disadvantage compared with middle-class children.

**Language**

Basil Bernstein (1975) distinguishes between elaborated and restricted speech codes.

- ▶ **The working class use the restricted code.** This is less analytic and more descriptive, has a limited vocabulary and is formed of simple sentences or even just gestures. It is particularistic – it assumes that the listener shares the particular meanings that the speaker holds, so the speaker doesn’t spell them out.
- ▶ **The middle class use the elaborated code.** This is more analytic, with a wide vocabulary and complex sentences. It is universalistic – speakers spell out their meanings explicitly and don’t just assume the listener shares them.

Crucially, the elaborated code is the one used in education, by teachers, exams, textbooks, university interviewers etc. This gives the middle class an educational advantage.

**Parents’ education**

**Feinstein** (2008) argues that parents’ own education is the most important factor affecting children’s achievement. Since middle-class parents tend to be better educated, their children gain an advantage.

- ▶ **Parenting style** Educated parents emphasise consistent discipline, high expectations, active learning and exploration. Less educated parents’ inconsistent discipline means children have poorer motivation and problems interacting with teachers.
- ▶ **Parents’ educational behaviours** Educated parents are more aware of what helps children progress, e.g. they form good relationships with teachers and see the value of educational visits.
- ▶ **Language** is an essential part of education. The way parents communicate affects children’s cognitive development.
- ▶ **Use of income** Educated parents spend their income to promote children’s development, e.g. on educational toys.

**Working-class subculture**

Cultural deprivation theorists identify three aspects of working-class subculture that contribute to under-achievement:

- ▶ **Immediate gratification** Wanting rewards now rather than being willing to make sacrifices and working hard for future rewards – unlike the deferred gratification practised by the middle class.
- ▶ **Fatalism** A belief that ‘whatever will be, will be’. Working-class children don’t believe they can improve their position through their own individual efforts.
- ▶ **Low value on education** Hyman argues that the working class don’t value education (and don’t believe they will benefit from it), so they don’t try. Douglas argues that working-class parents show less interest in their children’s education and give them less support; e.g. they are less likely than middle-class parents to attend parents’ evenings.

# CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH METHODS

## 1 Choice of Method and the Research Process

### Key Issues

- ▶ How do positivist and interpretivist approaches to research differ?
- ▶ What key concepts are used to judge the usefulness of research methods?
- ▶ What factors affect the sociologist's choice of research method and research topic?
- ▶ What happens in the research process?

### Evaluation

The relationship between sociological theory and research methods is very important. The sociologist's position affects their choice of research method, the kind of questions asked, the type of data collected, and whether the reliability and representativeness of data, or its validity, is seen as more important.

### Analysis

With a question on a particular method, start your answer by explaining why either positivists or interpretivists prefer to use that method – and why the other approach doesn't.

### Application

You must apply these three concepts to every research method. They are the essential 'vocabulary' to use in answer to any question about methods. Explain what it is about structured methods that produces reliable data and what it is about unstructured methods that produces valid data.

### Positivism versus interpretivism

**Positivists** argue that there is a measurable, objective social reality that exists 'out there', just like the physical world. They see our behaviour as the result of social forces shaping what we do, and the aim of research is to discover the underlying **causes** of our behaviour.

They use standardised methods of research, such as questionnaires, structured interviews, structured observation and official statistics. This enables them to obtain **reliable and representative quantitative data**.

They use this data to identify general patterns and trends in behaviour, from which they produce cause-and-effect explanations like those in the natural sciences.

**Interpretivists** claim that there is no objective social reality, just the subjective **meanings** that social actors give to events. Therefore, the aim of research is to uncover actors' meanings or worldview.

For interpretivists, this means using open-ended research methods that produce **valid, qualitative data**, such as unstructured interviews, participant observation and personal documents.

Such methods enable the sociologist to gain understanding by experiencing the group's lifestyle for themselves, or by allowing individuals to explain their worldview in their own words, without the sociologist imposing their own views on the research subjects.

### Three key concepts

Sociologists use three key concepts to judge the usefulness of a research method. These are **reliability, representativeness** and **validity**.

#### Reliability

For a method to be reliable, it must be **replicable**, i.e. exactly repeatable to obtain the same results, regardless of who actually carries out the research. Reliability also means using **standardised** forms of measurement. A reliable method creates data that can be used to systematically re-test hypotheses about social behaviour.

# 8 Methods in Context

## Key Issues

- ▶ How can each method be applied to the investigation of a particular research issue in education?
- ▶ What are the strengths and limitations of each method for studying particular research issues in education?

Experiments have been used to study educational issues such as:

- ▶ Teacher expectations
- ▶ Classroom interaction
- ▶ Labelling
- ▶ Pupils' self-concepts.

These issues can be examined in small-scale contexts that have clear physical and social boundaries, such as classrooms.

Experiments are generally less useful for investigating educational issues such as:

- ▶ Gender and achievement
- ▶ Education policy
- ▶ Selection and segregation.

These issues are large-scale topics that are hard to replicate in a laboratory or to find a suitable real-life situation to manipulate in a field experiment.

## Using experiments to study education

### Application in the classroom

Sociologists sometimes use field experiments to study aspects of classroom life such as teacher expectations and pupils' self-concepts. The classroom has clear boundaries in terms of both space and time. This makes it easier for the researcher to achieve a degree of control over the situation and develop an effective field experiment. Several researchers have also used laboratory experiments to investigate teacher expectations.

### Reliability

Experiments are often relatively simple and therefore easy to repeat. Although experiments in educational settings may not be exactly replicable, schools have broadly similar features and so experiments can still be repeated in broadly similar ways, e.g. the original 'Pygmalion in the Classroom' study has been repeated hundreds of times.

### Ethical problems

Some experiments have used pupils in real learning situations. However, there are particular ethical issues with carrying out experiments on young people. They are more vulnerable and are less able to understand what is happening to them, and therefore less able to give informed consent. Laboratory experiments are rarely used in educational research for these reasons.

### Limited application

Experiments are small-scale and can usually only examine a single aspect of behaviour. Larger issues in education, such as social class and achievement, cannot easily be studied using this method.

### Controlling all the variables

Experiments require researchers to control the variables in the situation. However, schools are large, complex institutions and many variables affect the behaviour of teachers and pupils, e.g. class size, streaming, type of school. It is impossible even to identify, let alone control, all the variables that might exert an influence on teachers' expectations.

## Using questionnaires to study education

### Practical issues

Questionnaires are very useful for gathering large quantities of basic information quickly and cheaply from large numbers of pupils, teachers or educational establishments. Researchers can use questionnaires to correlate factors such as achievement, attendance and behaviour with variables such as school size, class size and number of staff.

# CHAPTER 3 FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

## 1 Couples

### Key Issues

- ▶ Are couples becoming more equal?
- ▶ Does women being in paid work make a difference to the domestic division of labour?
- ▶ Who takes the decisions and controls the family's resources?
- ▶ How significant is domestic violence in couple relationships?

### Interpreting the question

Is the question about a particular form of inequality (e.g. domestic labour)? If so, stick to this. Or is it about inequality more generally? If so, cover decision making, resources and domestic violence as well.

Sociologists are interested in whether couples are equal or not. We can look at it in terms of the domestic division of labour, decision making and control of resources, and domestic violence.

### The domestic division of labour

The division of labour refers to the roles men and women play, e.g. housework, childcare, paid work. Do they share these equally? There are different views:

#### Functionalism

Parsons (1955) identifies two conjugal (marital) roles: **the instrumental role** of the male breadwinner and **the expressive role** of the female nurturer/carer.

Parsons argues that this gender division of labour among couples is functional for the family, its members and wider society. He sees this division as biologically based – women are naturally suited to nurturing, men to providing – so everyone benefits from this specialisation.

**The New Right** agree with Parsons that this biologically based gender division of labour is the best way of organising family life.

#### The 'march of progress' view

This view sees conjugal roles becoming more equal in modern society. Bott (1957) identifies two types:

- ▶ **Segregated conjugal roles** are separate. There is a sharp division of labour between male breadwinner and female homemaker (like Parsons' instrumental and expressive roles). Husband and wife spend their leisure separately. Young and Willmott (1962) found segregated conjugal roles in working-class extended families in Bethnal Green in the 1950s.
- ▶ **Joint conjugal roles** involve couples sharing domestic tasks and leisure.

**The symmetrical family** Young and Willmott (1973) see a long-term trend towards joint conjugal roles and the symmetrical family, where roles are more similar and equal:

- ▶ Most women now go out to work.
- ▶ Men help with housework and childcare (the 'new man').
- ▶ Couples spend their leisure time together. Men have become more home-centred and the family more privatised.

### Evaluation

Feminists reject the functionalist view – the division of labour is not 'natural' (e.g. it is not found in all societies) and it only benefits men.

## The personal life perspective (PLP)

PLP takes a 'bottom up' approach: to understand families, we must look at the **meanings** individual family members give to their relationships. This contrasts with functionalism, Marxism and feminism, which take a 'top down', structural approach.

By focusing on people's meanings, PLP draws attention to a range of other personal relationships that are important to people even though they may not be conventionally defined as (blood or marriage) 'family'.

These include all kinds of relationships that individuals see as significant and that give them a **sense of relatedness**, such as relationships with same-sex 'chosen families', fictive kin, friends, dead relatives, even pets.

### Donor-conceived children

These relationships raise questions about what counts as family from the viewpoint of the individuals involved.

**Nordqvist and Smart's** (2014) research on donor-conceived children found that parents often emphasised the importance of social relationships over genetic ones in defining 'family'.

- ▶ Where couples knew their donor, they had to resolve questions about whether he or she counted as family.
- ▶ Lesbian couples were concerned the sperm donor might be treated as the 'real' second parent.

#### Evaluation

PLP helps us understand how people themselves define different relationships as 'family'. But it ignores what might be special about 'traditional' family ties based on blood or marriage.

#### Application

You can apply this perspective to questions on family diversity because it draws attention to the diversity of relationships that people define as 'family'.

#### ONE TO TRY

#### Item A

Functionalism is based on a consensus view of society. Functionalists see the family as performing positive functions both for society as a whole and for all the individual members of the family. For example, Parsons argues that it is responsible for the primary socialisation of the young, equipping them to integrate into society.

However, the functionalist view of the family has been criticised by sociologists who argue that it ignores conflict and oppression in the family.

**Question** Applying material from **Item A** and your knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of the functionalist view of the family. (20 marks)

**Examiner's Advice** Start with a brief outline of the general functionalist perspective on society (e.g. the organic analogy). Link this to their view of the family as performing functions for society. You should consider a range of issues, e.g. the functions of the family, functional fit theory and the role of the nuclear family, universality of the family, instrumental and expressive roles etc. Make sure you use material from the Item. For example, you can link issues of conflict and oppression to feminism and Marxism, and use these perspectives plus the personal life perspective to evaluate functionalism.

# Practice Questions for Families and Households

There are several similarities between AS and A level questions on Families and Households, so we have grouped the practice questions below accordingly. You can either just select the ones that apply to you (AS or A level) or you can have a go at all of them.

## Item A

Sociologists argue that roles and statuses in the family are socially constructed and vary between times and cultures. Some statuses may be constructed as relatively powerful, while others may be defined as powerless or dependent. For example in UK families today, among adults of working age, males tend to have more power than females, while the young and the elderly may have even less power and a lower status.

## Item B

One popular image of the 'typical' family is a married, heterosexual couple and their biological children. However, some sociologists argue that this nuclear family is no longer the norm. They point to changes in the last 40 or 50 years, such as increases in lone parent families and cohabiting couples.

However, other sociologists argue that the importance of such changes is exaggerated and that most people will spend a significant part of their lives in a fairly conventional nuclear family.

### Questions for AS only

- AS Q1** Define the term 'household'. (2 marks)
- AS Q2** Using **one** example, briefly explain how the fall in the infant mortality rate may affect families. (2 marks)
- AS Q3** Outline **three** reasons for the decline in the number of marriages in recent decades. (6 marks)

### Question for A level only

- A level Q2** Applying material from **Item A**, analyse **two** factors affecting how the statuses of different family members are constructed. (10 marks)

### Questions for AS and A level

- AS Q4/A level Q1** Outline and explain **two** changes in the law that may have affected couples' roles or relationships. (10 marks)
- AS Q5/A level Q3** Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate the claim that the nuclear family has ceased to be the norm for family life in the United Kingdom today. (20 marks)

*Examples of Top Mark Answers to all the practice questions can be found in the final section of this book, along with Examiner's Comments on each answer.*



# Top Marks Answers

This section contains full mark answers to all the AS and A level practice questions in the previous section (in the same order as they appeared there), along with Examiner's Comments on them to show you how they got their marks.

## Answers to Education Questions

### AS Q1

Symbolic violence is when a group's culture is defined as being worth less than that of a mainstream group. One example is how schools devalue working-class dress style.

2/2

### AS Q2

An ethnocentric curriculum is one that reflects the dominant ethnicity or culture, e.g. teaching that the British Empire 'civilised' other countries. This can lower ethnic minority pupils' achievement by undermining their self-esteem.

2/2

### AS Q3 and A level Q2

One way that home background factors affect pupils' achievement is income. If parents do not have enough money for educational trips, internet access or private tuition, their children are likely to do less well than those whose parents can afford such things.

Another way is parents' own education. Well educated parents are more aware of what is needed for success at school and can socialise their children with the appropriate knowledge and skills to achieve.

A third way is language. If parents do not speak English, they may be unable to help their children with things like homework or communicate with the school to support their children's learning.

6/6

#### Examiner's Comments

Clear, accurate answers to all three short questions. You are not expected to write more than a sentence or two for each point you make.

### AS Q4

Anti-school subcultures take different forms but they all reject school values in some way. They can be the result of teacher labelling. Becker discovered that teachers often have a notion of the 'ideal pupil' against which they judge their pupils and this was not just based on the quality of their schoolwork. Often it was pupils' conduct and appearance that affected how they were judged and this meant that working-class pupils were more likely to be labelled negatively. Teachers often stereotyped working-class pupils as failures. This may lead to pupils feeling they have been unfairly rejected and find others who feel similarly. They may then bond together as a subculture that rejects the school that has rejected them.

Sociologists see streaming as another cause of anti-school subcultures. Lacey says streaming is a form of 'differentiation' or official labelling which says some pupils are better or more able than others. Pupils who are placed in lower streams thus have a lower status in the school's official status hierarchy. One response to this is to find ways of obtaining status elsewhere, from peers who are in the same stream. Because they are unable to achieve in the official status hierarchy, these pupils gain status by flouting or inverting the school's values, e.g. by truanting, misbehaving, breaking the rules etc. Lacey calls this process 'polarisation' – streams move in opposite directions. Top streams form a conformist pro-school subculture, while lower streams form an anti-school one.

10/10