

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS

Cambridge International Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Level

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2015 series

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/21

Paper 2 (Theory and Methods), maximum raw mark 50

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Section A

1 Positivists believe that the best way to find out about social behaviour is by applying the methods of the physical sciences [e.g. chemistry and biology]. This doesn't necessarily mean using laboratory experiments, as to use this method in sociological research would give rise to ethical issues. However, positivists do believe that sociologists should use quantitative methods that aim to identify and measure social structures. A good example of this approach would be Durkheim's study of suicide. A positivist approach allows the researcher to be as objective as possible and to prevent their own values and prejudice intruding upon the research process. This is why positivists prefer to collect data that is quantifiable and can be easily compared in order to establish correlations between variables and produce reliable data. It follows from this that research should be designed in such a way that other sociologists can replicate it and obtain similar results so as to confirm the evidence.

(a) What is meant by the term *ethical issues*? [2]

- 1 One mark for a partial definition such as 'participants should be accorded rights'.
- 2 Two marks for an accurate definition, such as researchers need to be mindful of the rights of those participating in research and the responsibility that sociologists hold toward them; for example, the importance of avoiding harm through the research or the maintenance of confidentiality.

An example on its own will not be credited. If an example is used to support a definition, thereby demonstrating understanding of the term, this will be credited.

(b) Describe two sociological research methods favoured by positivists, apart from laboratory experiments. [4]

The following methods are acceptable:

- Questionnaires
- Structured interviews
- There may also be reference to social surveys, quantitative secondary data [official statistics], content analysis all of which should also be credited and structured observation.

One mark for the example plus one mark for development (2 × 2 marks).

(c) Explain why some sociologists have questioned the value of quantitative data. [8]

0–4 Lower in the band a few simple points about quantitative data with no direct reference to their methodological 'value' could be worth 1 or 2 marks.

Higher in the band there may be a link made to the interpretivist perspective on research methods but without there being explicit links to some of the limitations of quantitative data.

5–8 Lower in the band there will be a sound account of the possible limitations of using quantitative data in sociological research, for example, that it may not capture the reasons for behaviour; that it is typically extracted in an artificial setting; there may be reference to the source of the data [e.g. official statistics] and to concepts like

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researcher imposition. Likely links made to the interpretivist perspective may be somewhat implicit or partial.

Higher in the band the links between the critique of quantitative data and a recognition of the position taken by the interpretivist approach (or any other sociological approach which is critical of quantitative data). Responses are likely to question and explain the validity of quantitative data. The analysis here needs to be explicit and well informed.

A good list of undeveloped points may gain up to six marks. To go higher, there needs to be development of three or more points.

N.B. This question asks candidates to 'explain', therefore there is no requirement for assessment.

(d) Assess the view that the findings of sociological research are only convincing when positivist methods are used. [11]

0–4 Answers at this level are likely to show only limited appreciation of the issues raised by the question.

Lower in the band, a simple answer that identifies a few basic features of positivist methodology, perhaps linked to the scientific approach, would gain 1 or 2 marks.

Higher in the band, an answer might advance a few limited observations about the differences between the social and natural sciences.

5–8 Answers at this level will show some sociological knowledge and understanding of the question.

Lower in the band, a simplistic description of the positivist and anti-positivist positions, could gain 5 or 6 marks.

Higher in the band, a more detailed account that highlights the merits of positivist methods would gain 7 or 8 marks. A one-sided answer that is done very well, could also gain up to 8 marks.

A descriptive answer cannot gain more than 8 marks.

9–11 Answers at this level will demonstrate good sociological knowledge and understanding applied to the question. There will also be an assessment of the view on which the question is based.

Lower in the band (9–10 marks), the assessment may be based on a simple juxtaposition of the positivist and anti-positivist views, or may be confined to just one or two evaluative points.

Higher in the band, the positivist position will be evaluated explicitly and in reasonable depth. The notion of 'only convincing' will be directly addressed, probably via a discussion of key concepts such as reliability, validity, objectivity and representativeness, and/or the role of values and bias in the research process. Very good responses might discuss the aims of research in relation to whether the method is fit for purpose.

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Section B

2 'Practical factors are more important than theoretical factors in influencing the choice of research method in sociology.' Explain and assess this view. [25]

Level 1 0–6 Answers at this level are likely to be assertive and focus on a few common sense observations.

Lower in the band, answers may be confined to one or two simple points based on assertion/common sense understanding.

Higher in the band, there may be a wider range of simple points based on assertion/common sense understanding. For example, the identification of some practical considerations in the choice of research method may deserve 5 or 6 marks.

Level 2 7–12 Answers at this level will show some sociological knowledge and understanding of the question.

Factors discussed might include various practical considerations such as

- time, money, location, size of sample, funding, nature of the study group, researcher skill, etc.,

and theoretical concerns such as

- The researcher's aims, values, interests [topic choice], and attitude to key issues such as validity, reliability, representativeness, and objectivity. Links made to positivism, interpretivism and realism.

Lower in the band (7–9 marks), the answer may be confined to a narrow range of points, lacking detail and possibly with some inaccuracies. A basic explanation of practical factors that influence a researcher's choice of research method, with little or no further development may gain up to 9 marks.

Higher in the band (10–12 marks), answers may either cover a narrow range of points in reasonable detail or cover a wider range of points in limited detail. There will be some recognition that choice of research method may also be affected by a range of factors although discussion of these will be limited either in terms of breadth or depth or real engagement with the proposition.

Level 3 13–18 Answers at this level will show good sociological knowledge and understanding. The material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.

Answers will identify a range of factors that may influence choice of research method and show a sound understanding of the part that *both* practical and theoretical factors may play in this process.

Lower in the band (13–15 marks), answers may use only a limited range of knowledge, there will be little use of concepts/theory, and the points covered may lack development.

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Higher in the band (16–18 marks), answers will use a wider range of knowledge, supported by the use of concepts/theory where relevant and include some well-developed points. At the top of the band the analysis will be sharper, though the conclusions drawn will still lack sufficient depth.

There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

Level 4 19–25 Answers at this level must achieve three things:

- **First**, there will be good sociological knowledge and understanding.
- **Second**, the material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.
- **Third**, there must also be some evidence of assessment. At this level expect an accurate and detailed account of the relative importance of both practical and theoretical factors in the choice of research method.

Lower in the band (19–21 marks), the assessment may be largely delivered through juxtaposition of contrasting arguments/theories. Alternatively, the assessment may be limited to just one or two evaluative points that are explicitly stated. The consideration of factors may be a little unbalanced, or perhaps covered in less depth

Higher in the band (22–25 marks), there will be sustained assessment and the points offered will be explicit and well-directed towards the question.

There is likely to be a well-formulated conclusion.

3 Human behaviour can be fully explained by the process of socialisation.' Explain and assess this view. [25]

Level 1 0–6 Answers at this level are likely to be assertive and focus on a few common sense observations.

Lower in the band, answers may be confined to one or two simple points based on assertion/common sense understanding. For example, some loosely relevant assertions about the nature of human behaviour may be worth 2 or 3 marks.

Higher in the band, there may be a wider range of simple points based on assertion/common sense understanding. For example, a few descriptive comments about the concept of socialisation based on a rudimentary sociological understanding.

Level 2 7–12 Answers at this level will show some sociological knowledge and understanding of the question.

Answers may tend to assume that socialisation is a key factor in shaping human behaviour rather than attempting to demonstrate this point explicitly and/or to challenge it in some way. Simple account of the cases of feral children may feature.

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Lower in the band (7–9 marks), the answer may be confined to a narrow range of points, lacking detail and possibly with some inaccuracies. Responses here are likely to be limited solely or mainly to a sound account of one theory of socialisation [most likely functionalist].

Higher in the band (10–12 marks), answers may either cover a narrow range of points in reasonable detail or a wider range of points in limited detail. Here, other theories of socialisation may feature alongside or in place of the functionalist theory but these are likely to be undeveloped.

Level 3 13–18 Answers at this level will show good sociological knowledge and understanding. The material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to the question. There may be arguments and/or some evidence supporting the idea that socialisation is a major factor shaping human behaviour. Feral children may figure, as well as examples of cross-cultural and/or historical diversity in forms of human behaviour. Durkheim may be used to demonstrate the importance of social forces in shaping human behaviour. Other theories, typically but not necessarily interactionist, may be developed as a way addressing the question.

Lower in the band (13–15 marks), answers may use a limited range of knowledge, there will be less use of concepts/theory, and the points covered may lack development.

Higher in the band (16–18 marks), answers will use a wider range of knowledge, supported by the use of concepts/theory where relevant and include some well-developed points. For example, an understanding of the grounds on which it may be said that some sociologists have exaggerated the importance of socialisation. There may be an analysis of structural theories with their tendency to be over-deterministic [the ‘oversocialised’ model]

There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

Level 4 19–25 Answers at this level must achieve three things:

- **First**, there will be good sociological knowledge and understanding.
- **Second**, the material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.
- **Third**, there must also be some evidence of assessment. At this level expect an accurate and detailed account of the extent to which socialisation provides the fullest explanation of human behaviour.

Here, the interactionist perspective may be used to good effect to illustrate the limitations of the functionalist theory of socialisation, and this may be complemented by other lines of analysis, perhaps focusing on the conservative and/or deterministic assumptions present in the functionalist perspective, or possibly links with non-sociological accounts of human behaviour, such as those in biology and psychology. A post-modernist critique of the concept of socialisation may feature.

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Lower in the band (19–21 marks), the assessment may be largely delivered through juxtaposition of contrasting arguments/theories. Alternatively, the assessment may be limited to just one or two evaluative points that are explicitly stated.

Higher in the band (22–25 marks), there will be sustained assessment and the points offered will be explicit and well-directed towards the question.

There is likely to be a well-formulated conclusion.