

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS

Cambridge International Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Level

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2015 series

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/23

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

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Section A

- 1 The three main types of interview in sociological research are structured, semi-structured and unstructured. An interview consists of a face-to-face question-and-answer session between interviewer and interviewee. Those sociologists who base their work on a quantitative, scientific approach are likely to use structured interviews. Structured interviews consist of questions that are very carefully worded by the researcher. During the interview itself, the researcher will try hard to standardise their performance as interviewers so that they behave in exactly the same way with each respondent.

The presence of the interviewer in the research process brings some advantages when compared to questionnaires, but it may also create the problem of researcher effect. Those researchers who follow the social action tradition in sociology are likely to use unstructured interviews. In this case, the presence of the interviewer in this process creates many advantages, but it can lead to the problem that researchers become heavily reliant on their interviewees' *subjective* understandings.

- (a) What is meant by the term *subjective*? [2]

- 1 One mark for a partial one such as 'how a person sees themselves and the world' or 'their own view of things'. Answers may well contrast the term with 'objective' [real, impartial, quantifiable] as a way of distinguishing the meaning of subjective and this should be credited.
- 2 Two marks for a clear and accurate definition. Subjective refers to the individual's internal understanding of experience and not based on external reality. This involves perceptions that are not necessarily linked to rational thinking.

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 reasons why sociologists need to be careful in the way questions are worded in an interview. [4]

- 1 The reasons might include:
 - Poorly phrased questions may be misunderstood or not understood by the respondents
 - Questions may be slanted towards a particular response
 - Some questions may cause embarrassment or offence
 - Some questions may fail to achieve their aim e.g. to elicit a detailed and thoughtful response.
 - N.B. answers that outline the 'researcher effect' should not be rewarded.
- 2 One mark for the reason plus one mark for development (2 x 2 marks).

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(c) Explain why interviews may create the problem of researcher effect. [8]

0–4 Reasons might include:

- the variety of influences that the presence of the researcher may have on the responses or behaviour of those being interviewed
- the social characteristics and demeanour of the interviewer
- social desirability
- the interview setting, rapport

Lower in the band a few general points about interviews with no clear reference to the problem of researcher effect would be worth 2 or 3 marks.

Higher in the band a simple statement of one or two reasons why interviews may create the problem of researcher effect.

5–8 Lower in the band there will be a sound account of the reasons why interviews may create the problem of researcher effect could merit 5 or 6 marks.

Higher in the band the account will be either more detailed or include links to relevant sociological perspectives. Expect to see reference to concepts such as 'social desirability', 'rapport'.

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

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(d) Assess the strengths and limitations of using interviews rather than questionnaires in sociological research. [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 interviews or questionnaires, without any reference to strengths/limitations would gain 1 or 2 marks.

Higher in the band, an answer might advance a couple of practical strengths/limitations of interviews without further development.

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

Lower in the band, answers are likely to concentrate solely or largely on practical strengths/limitations of interviews and ethical issues. Answers that lack balance i.e. consider only strengths or only limitations, can achieve no more than six marks.

Higher in the band, the answers will include more references to relevant theoretical issues and/or will make explicit comparisons between interviews and questionnaires. Candidates who distinguish between the different types of interview in terms of their strengths and limitations are also likely to enter at least the top of this band, and possibly higher.

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. At this level, we should expect answers to cover a good range of practical and theoretical points related to the strengths/limitations of interviews.

Lower in the band (9–10 marks), the assessment may be based on a simple juxtaposition, or may be confined to just one or two evaluative points, but there will also be a determined attempt to compare interviews with questionnaires.

At the top of the band, a clear analysis of the differences between the various types of interviews and/or the development of overall evaluative conclusions about the usefulness of interviews compared to questionnaires.

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Section B

2 Explain and assess the extent to which individuals are able to shape social reality. [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 about individuals' ability to shape social reality.
- Higher in the band, there may be a wider range of simple points based on assertion/common sense understanding. For example, there may be some broadly relevant references and there may be an attempt to show that the conditions of modern society have helped increase individual freedom, but the analysis will be extremely basic and may lack focus on the question's wording.
- Level 2 7–12 Answers at this level will show some sociological knowledge and understanding of the question.
- Lower in the band (7–9 marks), the answer may be confined to a narrow range of points, lacking detail and possible with some inaccuracies. Answers at this level will focus primarily on explaining the contention contained in the question. Simple descriptive accounts of the processes of socialisation are likely to feature here. A simple functionalist account of the constraining influences of social forces, for example, may be located here.
- 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. If there is developed in some way, typically through comparisons with other structural theories (e.g. Marxist, structuralist, etc.), a response should reach the higher part of the band.
- 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.
- Here the analysis will be more developed and explicit, though not necessarily detailed and convincing. There may be accounts of alternative sociological theories that accord more agency to the role of the social actor (individual or group) in shaping society. Interactionist, and post-modernist theories are the most likely. Candidates might usefully discuss empirical evidence to illustrate the issues e.g. from the sociology of education.
- 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.

There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

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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 individuals can shape social reality.

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. Arguments may be advanced both for and against the emphasis on social constraint that characterises structural theories, though the two sides do not need to be treated with equal consideration to achieve the highest marks. Assessment might also refer to the determinism/voluntarism debate and the notion of ‘oversocialised’.

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 Explain and assess the view that the most important influence on a sociologist’s choice of research method is their theoretical perspective. [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 but are likely to show little or no understanding of the question.

Higher in the band, there may be a wider range of simple points based on assertion/common sense understanding about what may influence choice of research method.

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

Lower in the band (7–9 marks), the answer may be confined to a narrow range of points, lacking detail and possible with some inaccuracies. There may be the idea that theoretical perspective is a major influence on choice of research method, but with no further development.

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 other factors. These include any of the following: various practical considerations such as time, money, location, size of sample, funding, nature of the study group, researcher’s skill set, etc., together with a range of theoretical concerns such as the researcher’s aims, values, interests, and attitude to key issues such as validity, reliability, representativeness, and objectivity.

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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.

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. As per the previous band, answers will identify a range of factors that may influence choice of research method and show a sound understanding of the part that theoretical perspective may play in this process.

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 any conclusions drawn may still lack some 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 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. At this level we should expect an accurate and detailed treatment of the role that theoretical perspective may play in the choice of research method. Other factors, both practical and theoretical, will also be considered, though perhaps in less depth than at the top of the band.

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 about the relative importance of theoretical perspective as an influence on selection of research method.