5.4 Social Learning Theory: Imitation, Modelling and Bandura's Research

AQA 7182 · about 50 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Outline what is meant by 'imitation' in Social Learning Theory, using a brief example in a classroom setting where a pupil copies a teacher.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Outline two strengths of Social Learning Theory compared with strict behaviourism, each with a brief explanation of why it matters for understanding human behaviour.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Explain the mediational process 'attention' in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, as it applies to observing aggressive behaviour in a playground and why some models attract attention.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Explain the mediational process 'retention' in Social Learning Theory and how it enables later imitation of a sequence of actions observed in a short TV clip.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

5 Explain the mediational process 'motor reproduction' in Social Learning Theory and why a learner's physical ability matters when imitating a model's skilled action.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

6 Describe Bandura, Ross and Ross's Bobo doll research procedure and main findings on the imitation of aggression, naming the key conditions and the pattern of results.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

7 A seven year old, Yusuf, watches an action movie at home in which a charismatic adult character uses aggressive words and pushes other characters, and the character is applauded by on-screen peers. The next day Yusuf replicates some of the aggressive words while playing with friends at school, but does not use the pushing behaviour. Explain, using Social Learning Theory and its mediational processes, why Yusuf imitated some aggressive behaviour and not other elements of the model's actions.

(Total for Question 7 is 6 marks)

8 Evaluate Social Learning Theory as an explanation of behaviour, compared with strict behaviourism. In your answer discuss strengths such as the inclusion of cognitive factors and social context, and limitations such as reliance on artificial laboratory studies and potential underestimation of biological influences. You should reach a balanced judgement.

(Total for Question 8 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · 5.4 Social Learning Theory: Imitation, Modelling and Bandura's Research

Question 1

states imitation is copying the behaviour of a model observed in others oe	**B1**
gives a brief classroom example, e.g. a pupil copying a teacher's method of answering a question oe	**B1**

Answer: Imitation is copying a model's behaviour; for example, a pupil sees a teacher raise their hand before speaking and copies that behaviour in class.

Question 2

identifies a strength, e.g. SLT recognises cognitive mediational processes (attention, retention, motor reproduction, motivation) oe	**M1**
explains why this matters, e.g. it explains how learning can be indirect and involves thought processes, making the theory more flexible for complex behaviours oe	**A1**
identifies a second strength, e.g. SLT accounts for the influence of social context and identification with role models oe	**M1**
explains why this matters, e.g. it can explain how cultural and gendered behaviours spread via models, which behaviourism alone cannot easily predict oe	**A1**

Answer: Strengths include recognising cognitive mediational processes which allow indirect learning and explain complex behaviour, and accounting for social context and identification with role models, which explains how cultural or gendered behaviours are transmitted.

Question 3

states attention is the first mediational process, involving focusing on the model's behaviour oe	**M1**
explains factors that influence attention, e.g. the model's distinctiveness, status or observers' interest, in the playground context oe	**A1**
links the idea to aggression, e.g. a child pays attention to a popular older child's aggressive play and so encodes it oe	**A1**

Answer: Attention is the first mediational process where the observer must notice the model's behaviour; for example, a child is more likely to notice and attend to aggressive play by a popular older child because of the model's status or the behaviour's salience.

Question 4

states retention involves storing a mental representation of the observed behaviour so it can be recalled later oe	**M1**
explains that retention can be improved by rehearsal or by the distinctiveness of the behaviour, helping later imitation oe	**A1**
gives an example, e.g. a child remembers the sequence of actions from a short TV clip and reproduces them at playtime oe	**A1**

Answer: Retention is storing a mental representation of the observed behaviour so it can be reproduced later; for example, a child remembers the sequence of moves from a short TV clip and later reproduces them at playtime.

Question 5

states motor reproduction is translating the mental representation into physical action oe	**M1**
explains that ability, practice and physical coordination affect whether the observer can reproduce the model's behaviour oe	**A1**
gives an example, e.g. a child may notice a complex skateboard trick but be unable to reproduce it until they develop the necessary skills oe	**A1**

Answer: Motor reproduction is translating the stored representation into real actions; physical ability and practice affect whether the observer can reproduce the model's skilled behaviour, for example a child may not yet have the coordination to copy a complex skateboard trick.

Question 6

outlines the basic procedure: children observed an adult model behaving aggressively towards an inflatable Bobo doll, or a non-aggressive model, or no model (control) oe	**M1**
notes that models were real adults and the children were later allowed to play with the Bobo doll in a separate room where imitation could be observed oe	**M1**
reports the main finding that children who observed aggressive models imitated aggressive actions and language more than those who observed non-aggressive or no model oe	**A1**
mentions that children were more likely to imitate same-sex models and that male models tended to elicit more physical aggression in boys oe	**A1**
notes the conclusion that observing aggression can lead to imitated aggressive behaviour, supporting observational learning and modelling oe	**A1**
adds that the study highlighted the role of vicarious reinforcement and attention in encouraging imitation, as part of SLT's mediational processes oe	**A1**

Answer: Children who observed an adult model behaving aggressively towards a Bobo doll later imitated aggressive actions and words more often than children who observed a non-aggressive model or no model. Same-sex models were imitated more, and boys tended to imitate physical aggression from male models more than girls. The findings supported observational learning, modelling and the mediational role of attention and vicarious reinforcement.

Question 7

identifies attention: Yusuf may have attended to the charismatic adult and the verbal aggression because the model was distinctive and rewarded by peers oe	**M1**
explains that vicarious reinforcement made the verbal aggression more likely to be imitated because Yusuf saw the model being applauded, increasing expected rewards oe	**A1**
identifies retention: Yusuf encoded the aggressive words which are easier to remember than a sequence of physical actions oe	**M1**
explains that verbal phrases are discrete units that are easier to rehearse and recall, supporting later reproduction oe	**A1**
identifies motor reproduction: Yusuf may lack opportunity or confidence to perform pushing at school, or physical constraints, so did not reproduce it oe	**M1**
links motivation: Yusuf may have been motivated to use the words because they gained attention at home and seemed rewarded, whereas pushing risked sanctions at school so motivation to perform it was lower oe	**A1**

Answer: Yusuf likely attended to the charismatic, rewarded model and encoded the verbal aggression; vicarious reinforcement increased his expectation of reward for copying words. Verbal phrases are easier to retain and rehearse than physical sequences, and Yusuf may lack the motor ability, opportunity or motivation to push others at school because of potential sanctions. Thus attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation together explain imitation of words but not of pushing.

Question 8

Level 4 Knowledge of Social Learning Theory is accurate and well detailed, including mediational processes and Bandura's findings. Evaluation is thorough and balanced, integrating strengths and limitations and comparing effectively with strict behaviourism. Argument is coherent with a clear, justified conclusion about the overall usefulness of SLT.	**10-12**
Level 3 Knowledge of SLT is generally accurate with some detail. Evaluation includes relevant strengths and limitations and some comparison with behaviourism, though the balance or depth may be uneven. Application and reasoning are mostly clear and supported.	**7-9**
Level 2 Knowledge is limited or partially accurate. Evaluation is present but superficial, with limited comparison to behaviourism. Arguments may be descriptive rather than analytical, and the judgement may be weak or underdeveloped.	**4-6**
Level 1 Knowledge is minimal and answers are brief or list-like. Evaluation is very limited or absent and comparison to behaviourism is missing. No coherent conclusion is reached.	**1-3**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Social Learning Theory proposes that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation and modelling, and emphasises mediational processes: attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation.
- AO1: Bandura's Bobo doll studies demonstrated that children imitated aggressive behaviour modelled by adults, that same-sex models were often imitated more, and that seeing a model rewarded increases imitation via vicarious reinforcement.
- AO3 strengths: SLT advances on strict behaviourism by recognising internal cognitive processes, explaining indirect learning and accounting for the role of social context and identification with role models, which helps explain cultural transmission of behaviour.
- AO3 strengths: SLT integrates observational learning with ideas about reinforcement without requiring direct reinforcement, matching many real-world situations where people learn from others' experiences.
- AO3 limitations: Much supporting evidence, including Bandura's laboratory studies, has been criticised for low ecological validity and demand characteristics, which may exaggerate imitation and limit generalisability to real-world complex social interactions.
- AO3 limitations: SLT may underplay biological influences such as innate temperament or hormonal factors that predispose individuals to aggressive responses, which behaviourism also does not address but which biological explanations cover.
- AO3 limitations: The theory can be criticised for being descriptive about how imitation occurs without offering precise mechanisms for how mediational processes operate neurologically, and for potential difficulties in predicting when imitation will occur.
- AO3 evaluation and comparison: Behaviourism gives clear, testable principles focused on stimulus-response associations and direct reinforcement, which can produce precise experimental predictions, but behaviourism struggles to explain learning that occurs without direct reinforcement or the importance of observed consequences, where SLT offers a better fit.
- Balanced judgement: Conclude that SLT is a major improvement over strict behaviourism for explaining learning in social contexts because it includes cognitive and social factors, but students should note its empirical limitations and that a full account of behaviour also requires consideration of biological factors and more ecologically valid research methods.