8.8 Idiographic and Nomothetic Approaches to Psychological Investigation: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 A clinical psychologist writes a detailed life history of one patient, including their family background, dreams and childhood memories, using interpretive qualitative analysis. Is this idiographic or nomothetic? Give one brief reason.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Which named psychological approach is most closely associated with idiographic methods such as case studies and unstructured interviews? Give one reason why.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

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3 Discuss the idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation. In your answer include reference to their methods, strengths and limitations, and show how the two approaches could be combined usefully. Refer to psychological research or real-world applications where appropriate.

(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)

4 Distinguish between idiographic and nomothetic aims in psychological investigation by giving two clear differences, each explained briefly, in the context of how data are collected and how findings are used.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 8.8 Idiographic and Nomothetic Approaches to Psychological Investigation: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

idiographic cao	**B1**
reason: it focuses on the individual in depth using qualitative data, so it does not aim to produce general laws oe	**B1**

Answer: Idiographic, because it focuses on one person's detailed life history using qualitative, interpretive methods rather than seeking generalisable laws.

Question 2

identifies humanistic approach (or psychodynamic) as associated with idiographic methods oe	**M1**
explains reason, e.g. focus on subjective experience, uniqueness of the person, or holistic understanding oe	**A1**
example such as case-study use in understanding a client's personal meaning is acceptable oe	**A1**

Answer: Humanistic approach. It emphasises subjective, individual experience and personal meaning, so researchers use case studies and unstructured interviews to explore each person's unique perspective.

Question 3

Level 4 Knowledge of idiographic and nomothetic approaches is accurate and detailed. Discussion evaluates strengths and limitations of both approaches thoroughly, with a clear, balanced judgement. There is effective and sustained application to research examples or practical contexts. The response is coherent, well organised and uses appropriate psychological terminology.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is generally accurate with some detail. Discussion includes evaluation of both approaches and is mostly balanced, though some points may be less developed. Application to research or practice is present but may not be consistently integrated. The response is mostly clear and organised and uses psychological terminology appropriately.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge of the approaches is present but limited or partially inaccurate. Discussion and evaluation are superficial or one-sided. Application is attempted but may be brief or loosely connected. The answer shows limited organisation and inconsistent use of psychological terminology.	**5-8**
Level 1 Knowledge is minimal and largely inaccurate or fragmentary. Evaluation is minimal or absent. Little or no application to research or practice. The answer lacks structure and academic terminology.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Idiographic approach defined, studies individuals in depth, typical methods include case studies, unstructured interviews and thematic qualitative analysis.
- AO1: Nomothetic approach defined, seeks general laws and patterns across groups, typical methods include experiments, large-scale surveys and statistical analysis.
- AO1: Examples: Freud's case-study work such as Little Hans as idiographic illustration; behaviourist lab experiments or large-scale cognitive memory studies as nomothetic examples.
- AO3: Strengths of idiographic approach: rich qualitative data, detailed understanding for clinical application, can generate new hypotheses and reveal rare phenomena.
- AO3: Limitations of idiographic approach: limited generalisability, subjectivity and researcher bias, difficulties with replication and falsifiability when aiming for scientific claims.
- AO3: Strengths of nomothetic approach: ability to produce generalisable laws, prediction and control, statistical testing and replication supporting scientific status.
- AO3: Limitations of nomothetic approach: may overlook individual differences and context, reduction of complex human experience to averages, potential loss of ecological or clinical validity.
- AO3: Ethical and practical considerations: idiographic methods are useful in therapy but raise issues about confidentiality and interpretation; nomothetic research may neglect minority experiences when shaping policy or diagnosis.
- AO3: Combining approaches: using idiographic case studies to generate hypotheses that are then tested nomothetically; embedding qualitative measures within quantitative designs to add depth to general findings.
- AO2: Application to practice: clinical psychology benefits from idiographic depth for treatment planning, while public health and educational policy rely on nomothetic generalisability for interventions.
- AO3: Evaluation and judgement: discuss which approach is more appropriate depending on research aim, and argue for complementarity rather than exclusivity, giving examples and a reasoned conclusion.

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Question 4

difference 1 stated: idiographic uses qualitative, in-depth data; nomothetic uses quantitative, large-sample data oe	**M1**
explains implication for data collection and analysis, e.g. idiographic yields rich subjective detail while nomothetic yields statistics/averages oe	**A1**
difference 2 stated: idiographic aims to understand individuals, nomothetic aims to produce general laws/predictions oe	**M1**
explains implication for use of findings, e.g. idiographic findings inform case-based understanding and therapy, nomothetic findings inform general theories and predictions oe	**A1**

Answer: Difference 1: idiographic uses qualitative, in-depth methods and yields rich subjective detail, whereas nomothetic uses quantitative, large-sample methods producing statistics and averages. Difference 2: idiographic aims to understand the unique individual for case-based insight, nomothetic aims to produce general laws that allow prediction and control across people.

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