1.3 Situational Variables in Obedience: Proximity, Location and Uniform

AQA 7182 · about 50 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Outline the proximity variable in Milgram's obedience variations and give the specific obedience percentage found when the 'teacher' had to force the learner's hand onto the shock plate (the touch-proximity condition). Name the variable, describe the touch-proximity manipulation, and quote the reported obedience rate.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 Calculate the percentage decrease in obedience when Milgram moved from his Yale laboratory baseline (about 65% obedience) to the run-down Bridgeport office building condition (about 47.5% obedience). Give your answer to 1 decimal place and show the calculation.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Outline the location variable in Milgram's obedience variations and state the obedience percentage found when the study was moved from the Yale laboratory to a run-down Bridgeport office building. Name the variable, describe the change of setting, and quote the reported obedience rate.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Outline the uniform variable in Milgram's variations and state the obedience percentage when the experimenter was replaced by a casually dressed assistant in plain clothes. Name the variable, describe how uniform was changed, and give the obedience rate.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

5 Bickman (1974) conducted a field experiment on uniform in a real urban setting. Outline one key finding from Bickman's study that supports Milgram's uniform variable, including the behaviour compared and the effect of uniform on compliance.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

6 Evaluate research into situational variables affecting obedience. In your answer you should refer to Milgram's variation studies on proximity, location and uniform, and to Bickman's field experiment on uniform. You must consider strengths and limitations of the research and discuss validity and generalisability.

(Total for Question 6 is 16 marks)

7 Outline one strength of using Bickman's field experiment as supporting evidence for Milgram's uniform variation. Explain why this strengthens the external validity or ecological validity of Milgram's finding.

(Total for Question 7 is 3 marks)

8 Application question: A regional manager asks staff by email to complete a new, time-consuming compliance report that is not in their usual duties. No one questions the manager, and staff submit the reports. Using the situational variables from Milgram's research, identify which variable best fits this scenario and explain in detail why this example maps onto that variable rather than the other two (proximity, location, uniform). Your answer should refer to features of the scenario and to the relevant obedience finding from Milgram's variations.

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.3 Situational Variables in Obedience: Proximity, Location and Uniform

Question 1

identifies proximity as the variable concerned with how physically or psychologically close the learner and experimenter were to the teacher oe	**M1**
describes the touch-proximity manipulation as the teacher having to place the learner's hand on the shock plate oe	**M1**
gives the obedience rate for the touch-proximity variation, about 30% cao	**B1**

Answer: Proximity refers to how physically or psychologically close the learner and experimenter were to the teacher. In the touch-proximity condition, where the teacher had to force the learner's hand onto the shock plate, obedience fell to about 30%.

Question 2

shows the calculation: (65 - 47.5) / 65 x 100 oe	**M1**
gives the correct answer to 1 dp: 26.9% cao	**A1**

Answer: Percentage decrease = (65 - 47.5) / 65 x 100 = 17.5 / 65 x 100 = 26.923...% = 26.9% (1 dp).

Question 3

identifies location as the variable concerned with the setting of the study, which can affect perceived legitimacy of the authority oe	**M1**
states the variation moved the study from Yale to a run-down Bridgeport office building to test the effect of location oe	**M1**
gives the obedience rate for the run-down office location, about 47.5% cao	**B1**

Answer: Location refers to the setting of the study. When Milgram moved the procedure from Yale to a run-down Bridgeport office building, obedience fell to about 47.5%.

Question 4

identifies uniform as whether the authority figure wore a lab coat versus everyday clothing oe	**M1**
explains that a lab coat conveys institutional legitimacy, whereas plain clothes reduce perceived authority oe	**M1**
gives the obedience rate for the plain-clothes variation, about 20% cao	**B1**

Answer: Uniform refers to whether the authority wore a lab coat or plain clothes. When the experimenter was replaced by a casually dressed assistant, obedience fell to about 20%.

Question 5

identifies Bickman's manipulation of uniform (e.g. security guard, milkman, or civilian clothing) oe	**M1**
states a key finding, e.g. people were more likely to follow a request from someone in a uniform indicative of authority than from someone in civilian clothes oe	**M1**
links this to support for Milgram's uniform variable, showing uniform increases perceived authority and compliance oe	**B1**

Answer: Bickman manipulated the outfit of confederates (for example, security-guard uniform versus civilian clothes) and found people were more likely to comply with requests from someone in authority-type uniform. This supports Milgram's finding that a lab coat increases perceived authority and obedience.

Question 6

Level 4 Knowledge of situational-variable research is accurate and detailed. Evaluation is thorough and well developed, showing a range of relevant evidence used interactively, including methodological critique, consideration of validity, and appropriate use of supporting and challenging studies such as Bickman. Argument is well structured, applied to the specified variables and reaches a balanced, justified conclusion. Specialist terminology is used accurately.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is generally accurate with some detail. Evaluation is clear and includes relevant strengths and limitations, with some integration of evidence and consideration of validity and generalisability. The answer applies material to the variables named, and reaches a reasoned conclusion, though may be less wide ranging or detailed than level 4.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited in development. Evaluation is present but may be superficial or one-sided, with limited use of supporting evidence. Application to the named variables may be attempted but underdeveloped. Conclusions may be weak or under-supported.	**5-8**
Level 1 Knowledge is minimal and answers may be fragmentary. Evaluation is simple, limited or absent. There is little or no use of evidence, and the answer lacks structure and specialist terminology.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Summary of key findings: proximity variations reduced obedience when experimenter was remote (about 20%) and when teacher had to forcibly place learner's hand on shock plate (about 30%); location change from Yale to run-down Bridgeport office reduced obedience to about 47.5%; uniform manipulation with casually dressed experimenter reduced obedience to about 20%, compared with baseline about 65%.
- AO3: Methodological strengths: systematic experimental variation allowed Milgram to isolate the effect of single situational features while keeping many procedures constant, giving controlled comparisons between conditions and clear cause-effect inferences within laboratory constraints.
- AO3: Internal validity concerns: demand characteristics and artificiality may affect responses; participants may have guessed aims or seen testing situation as contrived, which could either inflate or reduce obedience depending on interpretation, so causality claims should be cautious.
- AO3: Ecological validity and real-world generalisability: Milgram's lab variations are artificial scenarios, but Bickman's field experiment provides converging evidence that uniform increases compliance in everyday settings, supporting external validity for the uniform variable in particular.
- AO3: Sample and population validity: Milgram used mainly male American volunteers in the 1960s; this limits generalisability to women, other cultures and modern contexts. Replications (for example Perrin and Spencer style replications) show cultural and temporal variability in obedience effects.
- AO3: Ethical issues affecting validity: deception and potential harm in Milgram's studies raise both ethical criticisms and questions about participants' emotional states influencing behaviour, and ethical constraints now prevent exact replications, limiting cumulative evidence.
- AO3: Realism versus control trade-off: laboratory variations gave precise percentage comparisons but reduced realism; Bickman's field study increases realism but sacrifices experimental control, for example over participants' prior expectations, meaning convergent evidence is needed to build a robust conclusion.
- AO3: Alternative explanations and moderating variables: individual differences, situational norms, perceived legitimacy of authority, and the organisational context can moderate the effect of proximity, location and uniform; these factors mean situational variables are important but not sole determinants of obedience.
- AO3: Practical implications and theoretical contribution: demonstrating that simple situational changes can substantially alter obedience has implications for organisational practice, training and policy to reduce harmful obedience, and supports a situational influence perspective while acknowledging interactions with dispositional factors.
- AO3: Conclusion: a balanced judgement that Milgram's variation studies provide clear, influential evidence that proximity, location and uniform affect obedience in controlled settings, and that field evidence such as Bickman strengthens claims about uniform; however limits in sample, ethics and ecological realism mean findings should be generalised cautiously and understood as part of a wider set of interacting influences.

Question 7

identifies a strength such as higher ecological validity or real-world setting oe	**M1**
explains how the field setting reduces laboratory artificiality compared with Milgram's lab variations oe	**M1**
explains why this matters, e.g. it increases confidence that uniform effects on compliance generalise beyond Milgram's laboratory participants to everyday contexts oe	**A1**

Answer: A strength is that Bickman's field experiment was conducted in natural settings, increasing ecological validity compared with laboratory variations. This matters because it suggests the effect of uniform on compliance is not just an artefact of lab conditions but can occur in everyday interactions, strengthening generalisability of Milgram's uniform finding.

Question 8

identifies proximity (remote instruction) as the variable that best fits: the manager gives the instruction by email rather than in person oe (accept another variable only if clearly justified from the scenario)	**M1**
applies evidence: links the impersonal email, with the manager not physically present, to Milgram's remote-instruction (telephone) variation oe	**M1**
explains why not uniform: nothing in the scenario refers to dress or a uniform, so the manager's authority comes from organisational role rather than clothing oe	**A1**
explains why not location: usual workplace setting is not the dramatic change of prestige seen in the Bridgeport office variation oe	**A1**
uses Milgram's relevant obedience rate to support the judgement, e.g. remote instruction produced much lower obedience (about 20%) than baseline (about 65%), showing reduced immediacy oe	**M1**
concludes how these features explain the staff compliance in the scenario compared with Milgram's patterns, acknowledging any limits of the analogy oe	**A1**

Answer: This scenario best fits the proximity variable, specifically remote instruction: the manager gives the instruction by email, so is not physically present to exert direct pressure. It is not a uniform case because nothing in the scenario refers to dress, and it is not a location change because the staff are in their usual workplace. Milgram found that when the experimenter gave instructions by telephone, obedience fell to about 20% compared with a baseline of about 65%; here staff still complied despite reduced immediacy, which could be explained by organisational hierarchy and routine expectations of following a manager's instructions. The analogy is imperfect because workplace norms and contractual duties may increase compliance beyond what Milgram's volunteer participants showed.