1.3 External Factors in Class Differences in Educational Achievement

AQA 7192 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary. Write full sentences for questions worth 4 marks or more. The final 12-mark question requires an evaluative response and a brief conclusion.

1 Item A: A recent local council survey of 14-16 year olds found that 35% of low-income pupils reported not having a quiet place to study at home, 28% reported missing homework because they had caring responsibilities, and 22% reported being unable to afford essential school materials. Using Item A and your knowledge, explain two ways material deprivation described in the Item could affect educational achievement.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Explain one strength and one limitation of using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to explain class differences in educational achievement.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Identify and explain two criticisms of Sugarman's cultural deprivation approach that question its ability to explain contemporary class differences in achievement.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Explain two ways that family financial instability might reduce a teenager's chance of entering higher education, referring to both material costs and cultural factors.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Item B: A community study reports that pupils from low-income households attend school less regularly, are more likely to take part-time paid work, and are less likely to have parents with higher education. The study also notes some local schools have fewer specialist teachers. Using Item B and wider knowledge, evaluate how far external, out-of-school factors are the main cause of class differences in achievement.

Applying material from the Item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that external factors are the main cause of class differences in educational achievement.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

6 Define the term 'cultural capital' as used in sociological explanations of class differences in educational achievement.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Identify and explain two features of Sugarman's cultural deprivation theory that may help explain class differences in educational achievement.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Define 'opportunity cost' as it relates to decisions about staying in education for young people from low-income backgrounds.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Identify and explain one way poor diet and nutrition, as part of material deprivation, can affect a pupil's achievement in school.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

10 State one criticism commonly made of the cultural deprivation thesis when applied to class differences in achievement.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Identify and explain two ways that the direct costs of education, such as exam fees and uniform costs, can produce class differences in educational achievement.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.3 External Factors in Class Differences in Educational Achievement

Question 1

identifies first way from Item A, e.g. lack of quiet study space reduces revision and homework completion	**B1**
explains first way, linking to lower attainment or poorer exam performance	**B1**
identifies second way from Item A, e.g. caring responsibilities cause missed homework and time for study	**B1**
explains second way, linking to falling behind peers and lower grades	**B1**

Answer: A lack of a quiet place to study reduces time and quality of revision and homework, which undermines preparation for exams and lowers attainment; caring responsibilities cause pupils to miss homework and have less time for study, leading them to fall behind peers and achieve lower grades. Being unable to afford essential materials can also restrict participation and the quality of coursework.

Question 2

identifies a strength, e.g. explains how middle-class knowledge and tastes fit school norms and produce lasting advantage	**B1**
develops the strength, e.g. links to differential treatment by teachers and curriculum that values middle-class culture	**B1**
identifies a limitation, e.g. may underplay material factors such as poverty that also restrict achievement	**B1**
develops the limitation, e.g. cultural capital alone may not explain lack of resources, attendance problems or the direct costs of education	**B1**

Answer: Strength: cultural capital explains how middle-class knowledge, language and tastes fit school norms, giving these pupils an advantage and influencing teacher expectations; Limitation: it may underplay material factors such as poverty and lack of resources, which directly restrict attendance, subject choice and access to revision support.

Question 3

identifies first criticism, e.g. it generalises about working-class culture and risks blaming the victim	**B1**
explains first criticism, e.g. cultural explanations ignore structural issues such as poverty, poor housing or school funding	**B1**
identifies second criticism, e.g. empirical evidence is mixed and many working-class pupils achieve highly	**B1**
explains second criticism, e.g. this suggests culture alone cannot account for class differences and that policies and schools also matter	**B1**

Answer: One criticism is that Sugarman generalises about working-class culture and risks blaming the victim, ignoring structural issues like poverty and poor housing; another is that empirical evidence is mixed and many working-class pupils achieve highly, implying culture alone cannot explain class differences and that school policies and resources also matter.

Question 4

identifies first way, e.g. direct material costs such as tuition, maintenance and application fees deter continuation	**B1**
develops first way, e.g. worry about debt or need to contribute financially can lead to choosing work over higher education	**B1**
identifies second way, e.g. cultural factors such as lack of parental experience of higher education reduce aspiration and knowledge of application process	**B1**
develops second way, e.g. limited advice and expectations in the home make the path to university seem less attainable	**B1**

Answer: Material costs like tuition, living expenses and application fees can deter continuation because young people may fear debt or need to earn money, choosing work instead of university; cultural factors, such as parents lacking experience of higher education, reduce aspiration and practical knowledge of applications, making university seem less attainable.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic statements about external factors with little application to the Item. Limited use of sociological knowledge and minimal evaluation. Conclusion, if any, is unsupported.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some accurate description of external factors and some application to Item B. Some attempt at evaluation with at least one relevant criticism or alternative explanation, but analysis is limited and conclusion is simple.	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear explanation of several external factors with good application to Item B. Balanced evaluation that considers internal school factors and methodological or theoretical criticisms. A supported conclusion that answers the question is present.	**7-9**
Level 4 Detailed, well-developed explanation and focused use of Item B to support points about external causes. A wide range of sociological perspectives and evidence is evaluated, comparing external factors with internal factors such as labelling, setting and school resources. Strengths and limitations of the evidence are analysed and a reasoned, supported judgement is given.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- External factors to explain: material deprivation including poor housing, lack of study space, inability to afford materials and opportunity costs of staying in education; cultural deprivation ideas including Sugarman's immediate gratification and Bernstein's speech codes; Bourdieu's cultural capital showing how middle-class backgrounds match school norms; family influences such as parental education and expectations; labour market pressures and part-time work reducing study time.
- Apply Item B: link irregular attendance to poverty and health consequences, link part-time paid work to opportunity costs and reduced revision time, link parents without higher education to lower cultural capital and limited guidance about university choices.
- Evaluate alternative explanations and limitations: internal school factors such as teacher expectations, labelling, setting and school funding differences (some local schools have fewer specialist teachers, as Item B notes); the role of policy, school resources and teacher-pupil interactions; interactionist explanations about pupil identity and subcultures; methodological limitations of Item B such as it being a small community study lacking representativeness and possible causal ambiguity.
- Compare perspectives: Marxist or materialist views emphasise structural inequalities and poverty as primary causes; cultural explanations emphasise values and language; interactionist or labelling theories point to in-school processes that can reproduce class differences; some synthesis arguments claim both external and internal factors interact, for example material deprivation increases absence which then triggers negative teacher labelling that lowers attainment.
- Consider empirical evidence and policy implications: evidence that free school meals, targeted funding and early years support can reduce gaps supports external cause importance; counter-evidence that pupils from similar backgrounds succeed in well-resourced schools supports the role of school factors.
- Conclusion: give a balanced judgement on extent, for example that external factors are major contributors but are not the sole cause, and that interaction with in-school processes and policy contexts is crucial, so external factors are important but not always the main cause in every context.

Question 6

identifies cultural capital as non-financial assets such as knowledge, language, tastes and qualifications that benefit pupils in education (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. these assets make it easier to succeed in a school system that values middle-class culture **B1**

Answer: Cultural capital is non-financial assets such as knowledge, language, tastes and manners that benefit pupils in education; these assets make it easier to succeed in a school system that values middle-class culture.

Question 7

identifies first feature, e.g. immediate gratification orientation among some working-class subcultures **B1**

explains first feature, e.g. immediate gratification leads to focus on short-term rewards rather than long-term educational goals, reducing persistence in study **B1**

identifies second feature, e.g. present-time orientation or fatalism **B1**

explains second feature, e.g. fatalism lowers aspirations because effort is seen as unlikely to change life chances, reducing engagement with schooling **B1**

Answer: Sugarman suggested working-class subcultures may show immediate gratification, focusing on short-term rewards rather than deferred educational goals, and present-time orientation or fatalism, the belief that effort will not change outcomes; both reduce long-term motivation and engagement with schooling, helping to explain lower achievement.

Question 8

identifies opportunity cost as the benefits forgone by choosing one option over another, such as lost earnings from not working **B1**

development, e.g. for low-income pupils the opportunity cost of staying in education can be the wages they could have earned, reducing incentive to remain in full-time study **B1**

Answer: Opportunity cost is the benefits forgone by choosing one option over another, for example the wages a young person gives up by staying in education instead of working; for low-income pupils this lost income can reduce the incentive to remain in full-time study.

Question 9

identifies poor diet or malnutrition as the factor **B1**

explains short-term effects, e.g. poor concentration or low energy in lessons **B1**

explains longer-term effects, e.g. impacts on cognitive development or persistent absenteeism due to ill health **B1**

links to achievement, e.g. lower test scores and classroom progress over time **B1**

Answer: Poor diet and malnutrition can reduce concentration and energy in lessons and, in the longer term, may impair cognitive development or lead to repeated illness and absence; these effects reduce classroom progress and test scores, lowering overall achievement.

Question 10

identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it blames the victim by portraying working-class culture as deficient **B1**

brief development, e.g. critics say it ignores structural causes such as poverty and unequal schooling **B1**

Answer: One criticism is that cultural deprivation blames the victim by portraying working-class culture as deficient; critics argue this ignores structural causes like poverty and unequal access to quality schooling.

Question 11

identifies first way, e.g. inability to afford resources or subject materials limits course choices	**B1**
explains first way, e.g. pupils cannot take certain subjects or practical options, restricting qualifications achieved	**B1**
identifies second way, e.g. costs like exam entry fees or revision materials reduce participation in exams or revision support	**B1**
explains second way, e.g. missing entries or lacking revision resources can lead to lower grades or fewer qualifications	**B1**

Answer: Direct costs such as inability to afford course materials or subject-specific equipment can prevent pupils taking certain subjects, limiting the qualifications they achieve; costs such as exam fees or revision materials can reduce participation in exams or access to revision support, leading to lower grades and fewer qualifications.