1.5 Gender Differences in Educational Achievement

AQA 7192 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological terms where appropriate. At least two answers must be written in full sentences: questions 5 and 10 are extended and require continuous prose.

1 State one finding from sociology research about 'laddish' or anti-school subcultures and their relationship to boys' educational underachievement.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 State one policy introduced in UK schools aimed at reducing gender stereotyping in subject choice, and briefly say how it works.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Explain two ways in which school assessment methods have been argued to advantage girls and help explain their improved GCSE outcomes.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Explain two practical steps a secondary school could take to reduce gender stereotyping in subject choice and support more balanced attainment across subjects.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that changes in out-of-school factors, rather than changes inside schools, are the main reason for girls improving their educational achievement. In your answer, refer to different sociological perspectives and evidence, and reach a supported conclusion.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

6 Define what sociologists mean by 'gender differences in educational achievement' in the context of UK secondary schools.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Identify and explain two internal school factors that sociologists link to the improvement in girls' achievement in secondary schools.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Describe one way subject choice can affect gender differences in achievement in UK secondary schools.

(Total for Question 8 is 3 marks)

9 Describe two ways in which changes in family structure have been suggested to influence girls' achievement in school.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

10 Outline and explain two reasons sociologists give for the overall improvement in girls' educational achievement in UK secondary schools since the 1980s.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Explain two criticisms sociologists have made of cultural explanations that attribute girls' success mainly to improved female role models and aspirations.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.5 Gender Differences in Educational Achievement

Question 1

identifies a finding, e.g. researchers such as Mac an Ghaill and Epstein found that some boys adopt laddish attitudes that devalue schoolwork **B1**

brief development, e.g. this can lead to lower effort and poorer results among boys in those groups **B1**

Answer: Researchers such as Mac an Ghaill and Epstein found some boys adopt laddish attitudes that devalue schoolwork, which can lead to lower effort and poorer results among those boys.

Question 2

states a policy, e.g. GIST or WISE-style initiatives encouraging girls into science and technology **B1**

brief explanation, e.g. they offer outreach, role models and information to challenge stereotypes and make subjects seem more accessible **B1**

Answer: GIST or WISE-style initiatives encourage girls into science and technology by offering outreach, female role models and information to challenge stereotypes and make those subjects seem more accessible.

Question 3

identifies one way, e.g. increased use of coursework and continuous assessment **B1**

explains how it advantages girls, e.g. girls often organised and compliant, performing well in coursework tasks **B1**

identifies second way, e.g. changes to GCSEs and the rise of vocational and communicative subjects **B1**

explains how it advantages girls, e.g. subjects with assessment styles favouring verbal and written skills play to girls strengths **B1**

Answer: The increased use of coursework and continuous assessment advantages girls because they tend to be more organised and compliant, doing well in coursework. Changes to GCSEs and growth of subjects that reward verbal and written skills also advantage girls, as these assessment styles often play to girls strengths.

Question 4

identifies one practical step, e.g. using female and male role models and careers talks in all subjects **B1**

develops it, e.g. this challenges stereotypes and shows diverse career paths linked to each subject **B1**

identifies second practical step, e.g. training teachers to avoid gendered language and biased expectations **B1**

develops it, e.g. changes in classroom interaction and teacher expectations can boost confidence among underrepresented genders **B1**

Answer: One step is to invite both female and male role models and run careers talks for all subjects to challenge stereotypes and show diverse career paths. A second is teacher training to avoid gendered language and biased expectations, changing classroom interaction to boost confidence among underrepresented genders.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic statements about one or two factors with limited development. Little use of sociological concepts or evidence. Conclusion, if present, is weak. **1-3**

Level 2 Some relevant points about out-of-school and in-school factors, with some development. Includes one or two sociological studies or perspectives, but analysis is limited and the conclusion is partial. **4-6**

Level 3 Good analysis of both out-of-school and in-school explanations, with appropriate sociological studies and perspectives used to support claims. Balanced argument and a reasoned conclusion, though not fully evaluative. **7-9**

Level 4 Excellent evaluation showing clear understanding of competing explanations. Uses a range of sociological perspectives and named studies, assesses strengths and limitations of evidence, and reaches a well supported and balanced conclusion. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- Out-of-school factors supporting girls improvement: changing gender role expectations, increased labour market opportunities for women, and changes in family structure raising aspirations; cite Sue Sharpe on changing priorities and statistical trends in female higher education entry
- In-school factors: equal opportunities policies (GIST, WISE), teacher expectations and classroom interaction changes, curriculum change and assessment reforms such as coursework and GCSE modifications that have advantaged girls
- Interactionist and feminist perspectives: liberal feminists stress policy and opportunity changes; radical feminists focus on persistent patriarchal barriers in school and society; interactionists focus on teacher labelling and classroom interaction
- Marxist or materialist critiques: point to class and material resources as crucial, arguing that class intersects with gender so improvements for middle-class girls may not apply to working-class girls
- Evidence limitations: difficulty of isolating causes, mixed findings in research, and issues of representativeness; some studies show policies helped, others highlight continued gendered subject segregation and boys underachievement
- Consideration of boys: some sociologists argue focusing only on girls misses rising concerns about boys and 'laddish' subcultures (Epstein, Mac an Ghaill) which complicate the picture
- Conclusion should weigh the evidence, for example arguing that both out-of-school and in-school factors are important and interact, so sociologists would not fully agree that one set alone explains girls' improvement

Question 6

identifies that it refers to the measurable differences in attainment between boys and girls in education, for example exam results **B1**

development, e.g. could mention differences at GCSE level, subject choice patterns or progression to higher education **B1**

Answer: Differences in measurable attainment between boys and girls in education, for example at GCSE, including subject choices and rates of progression to further or higher education.

Question 7

identifies one internal factor, e.g. equal opportunities policies such as GIST and WISE **B1**

explains how it helps, e.g. such policies encourage girls into non-traditional subjects and reduce gender stereotyping in the curriculum **B1**

identifies a second internal factor, e.g. changes in teacher expectations and classroom interaction **B1**

explains how it helps, e.g. teachers now give more praise and encouragement to girls, leading to better motivation and attainment **B1**

Answer: Equal opportunities policies such as GIST and WISE encourage girls into non-traditional subjects and reduce stereotyping; and changes in teacher expectations and classroom interaction, with more praise and higher expectations for girls, increase motivation and attainment.

Question 8

identifies a way, e.g. gendered patterns of subject choice such as more boys choosing computing and more girls choosing English **B1**

development, e.g. this affects measured achievement because high-scoring subjects can be chosen more by one gender **B1**

further development, e.g. subject choice influences future study and career routes, reinforcing gendered outcomes **B1**

Answer: Gendered subject choice, for example more boys in computing and more girls in English, can affect measured achievement because different subjects have different grading patterns and influence future study and career routes, reinforcing gendered outcomes.

Question 9

identifies one way, e.g. increase in single-parent households led by mothers **B1**

development, e.g. mothers as sole earners can act as role models, showing girls the value of education for economic independence **B1**

identifies a second way, e.g. smaller family sizes or later childbearing **B1**

development, e.g. more parental investment per child can support better educational outcomes for girls **B1**

Answer: More single-parent households led by mothers can provide role models of female economic independence, encouraging girls to value education; and smaller family sizes or later childbearing can mean more parental investment per child, supporting better educational outcomes.

Question 10

identifies one reason, such as changing labour market and increased opportunities for women **B1**

explains how this reason helps, e.g. raises aspirations and the value of qualifications **B1**

identifies a second reason, such as policy changes, e.g. equal opportunities and GCSE coursework **B1**

explains how this reason helps, e.g. coursework and policies reduced gender bias in assessment and encouraged girls into wider subject choices **B1**

Answer: One reason is changing labour market opportunities for women, which raises girls' aspirations and the perceived value of qualifications. A second reason is policy changes, such as equal opportunities initiatives and the introduction of coursework, which reduced gender bias in assessment and encouraged girls into a wider range of subjects.

Question 11

identifies a criticism, e.g. not all girls benefit equally and social class affects who can convert aspiration into success **B1**

develops the criticism, e.g. working-class girls may still face structural barriers such as lack of resources or school support **B1**

identifies a second criticism, e.g. overemphasis on girls ignores persistent problems with boys' underachievement **B1**

develops the criticism, e.g. policy responses need to address both gender and class, and particular male subcultures that disadvantage boys **B1**

Answer: One criticism is that cultural explanations ignore social class differences: not all girls can convert improved aspirations into achievement because of material limits. A second criticism is they overemphasise girls and underplay boys' underachievement and male subcultures, so policies need to address class and masculinity as well as female aspiration.