

A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY (AQA)

**METHODS IN THE CONTEXT OF
EDUCATION QUESTIONS**

KEITH TROBE

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KEITH TROBE is a senior examiner for A level Sociology with a major examination board and has been for over thirty-five years. He is also co-author of the best selling Napier Press A level Sociology textbook and revision book series.

EXAMINER INSIGHT SERIES

METHODS IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION – USING THIS EBOOK

The purpose of this ebook is to improve the quality of candidate answers to this type of question from AQA Paper 1. Many candidates do not get past 12/20 because they do not understand what examiners are looking for in answers. There are several '**Examiner Insight**' boxes in the ebook which give clear indications of what an examiner will be thinking as they mark answers to this question.

Section 1 explains the structure of this type of question. The Method in Context of Education question, commonly known as the 'MIC', is a unique kind of question in that it is marked statement by statement in 'Bands' rather than as a whole essay. These Bands/levels form an Application skills gradient and the more the method specified in the question is applied to the education issue in it, the better the mark. Examiners will have these Bands/levels in their minds whilst marking an answer. The Bands 1 to 5 are explained in this section.

Section 2 examines different quality answers to a specimen question. Each of the four answers are marked using the Band 1 to 5 (B1-B5) examining method. The comments box indicates the number of times each band has been reached with a brief explanation of each. In reaching the overall mark, an examiner will essentially 'tot up' the number of B1s, B2s, B3s etc. Crucially, without B4 and B5 statements, an essay cannot get above 12/20.

Section 3 focuses on how to develop these Band 4 and 5 statements. First of all, it looks at the research characteristics of the education context in terms of pupils, teachers, parents, classrooms and schools. However, to move towards Band 4 and 5 statements, an answer also needs to use the research characteristics of education research issues. Section 3.3 identifies some of these for ten research issues that are likely to come up in an exam.

Section 4 identifies the advantages and disadvantages of the methods that commonly feature in these questions.

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THE METHOD IN CONTEXT OF EDUCATION QUESTION

1 QUESTION STRUCTURE

The Method in Context (MIC) question – an applied methods question

The key to understanding the MIC question is to ask where the application skill is in it. The format of the question is the same on every exam paper and unpacking the format shows exactly what it wants a candidate to do in terms of application.

A typical MIC question:

Applying material from Item C and your own knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using group interviews to investigate anti-school pupil subcultures. (20 marks)

Where is the application in this kind of question?

The skill of application requires candidates to apply/link/connect two things. In this question you need to connect a method and an education issue.

So the core format if the MIC is:

‘Applying material from Item C and your own knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using a METHOD to investigate an EDUCATION ISSUE.’

EXAMINER INSIGHT!

Answers to the MIC question are marked in a very different way to other essays. The examiner will read each statement/point made (this could be a single sentence or several sentences) and make a decision about what band it merits. There are five ‘Bands’ ranging from B1 (the lowest) to B5 (the highest). The examiner will look at each statement and allocate a band to it. This is then recorded in the right hand margin of the exam script. The examiner works through the essay statement by statement allocating a Band (sometimes called a ‘level’) to each point made by the candidate. At the end of the essay, the examiner will then count up the number of different B1 – B5s made in the answer. That then leads to the final mark.

So if the examiner is marking the answer point by point, then candidates need to focus on what each point is saying.

What are Band 1-5s?

The examiner will be applying a set of Band (or level) descriptors ranging from B1 to B5. These reflect an ‘application skills gradient’. The more application in a statement, the higher the Band given. The ultimate is a Band 5 which is given when the statement connects a strength or limitation of the method to something about the education issue that affects how the research is carried out.

THE APPLICATION SKILLS GRADIENT

Example Question:

Applying material from Item C and your own knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using group interviews to investigate anti-school pupil subcultures. (20 marks)

Band 1 response:

No mention of group interviews or a statement about sociological explanations of anti-school pupil subcultures such as *'Hargreaves found that they resulted from being put into lower streams by the school'*.

Band 2 response:

A simple, undeveloped statement about the method - more a characteristic of the method rather than a strength or limitation such as *'group interviews allow for face-to-face interaction'*. (Yes they do, but is this a strength or a limitation - or both?) Or a simple, undeveloped statement about researching education lacking in explanation such as *'pupils are harder to study because they are young'*.

Band 3 response:

A statement which explains a strength or limitation of the method such as *'group interviews give the interviewees more power in the interaction because there are several of them in the interview'*, but which isn't linked to the specific education issue. Alternatively, a statement about the research characteristics of pupils which is true whatever the education research issue and whatever the method, such as *'pupils are harder to research because they have less status and authority than an adult researcher'*.

Band 4 response:

A statement which identifies a specific characteristic of the research issue but which is not then attached to the specified method such as *'members of anti-school pupil subcultures are more likely to be from a working-class background with attitudes based on values such as immediate gratification and fatalism which means they may not cooperate with the researcher'*. Alternatively, the answer could apply a strength or limitation of group interviews to education in general (but not specifically to anti-school pupil subcultures) such as *'pupils have less status and authority because of their age than adult researchers so group interviews can help to overcome differences in power and status between pupil/interviewees and researcher/interviewer because the greater number of interviewees present compensates for the higher status of the researcher'*. This is true of pupils (the education context) but not specific to anti-school pupil subcultures.

Band 5 response

Here the statement connects the strength of group interviews specifically to researching the issue of anti-school pupil subcultures. For example, *'it is often working-class pupils who are members of anti-school pupil subcultures and they will feel the power and status differences between themselves and a middle-class, university-educated researcher which might intimidate them (characteristic of the research issue). Group interviews can help to overcome this because the pupils present outnumber the researcher and feel that they are strong in numbers'* (strength of group interviews).

