

Methods in Context Revision Question

ITEM B

On average, working-class pupils underachieve in education compared with those from middle-class backgrounds. Some sociologists believe that material deprivation is one factor that causes working-class underachievement. Other sociologists argue that values and attitudes in working-class homes may cause underachievement. School factors may also affect achievement.

Sociologists may use written questionnaires to study working-class educational underachievement. Using written questionnaires enables the researcher to reach a large number of pupils, parents and teachers. Also, those who complete the questionnaire can usually remain anonymous. However, not all those who receive a questionnaire will complete it.

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using written questionnaires to investigate working-class educational underachievement.

ONE – Written questionnaires are a type of survey where questions are standardised and distributed to large numbers of people. This is useful in an educational setting because it means they can be given to numerous students in numerous schools, something which is very important when investigating working class pupils as there are many regions which are predominantly working class.

First paragraph – general advantages of written questionnaires – standardised and large distribution. Attempt to link to topic

TWO – One major advantage of using questionnaires is that they pose relatively few practical issues. They are fairly cheap to create and distribute and they quick to fill out, especially if all questions are closed ended. This means that access is not usually an issue for the researcher as they will not disrupt lessons as much as other methods such as structured interviews, meaning that the researcher is more likely to received permission from the gatekeeper. Furhtermore, working class pupils are more likely to need to take on paid work and so the quick-nature of questinnaires which are not very time consuming means that they are useful for investigating working class **underachievement**.

Para 2 – advantage of Wc related to context of research in schools (gatekeepers).

THREE – However, when investigating working class pupils there may be the issue of cultural deprivation, particularly language issues. Berciler and Englemann argue that the language spoken by the working class is deficient, a particular issue when trying to interpret the questions on a written question questionnaire. When coupled with the fact that questionnaires are written in the elaborated code but working class pupils (and parents) tend to speak in the restricted code this can be a major problem in gaining accurate results; unlike with other methods, questions cannot be clarified

Para 3 – good link to topic and WQ re language and speech codes.

FOUR – As well as posing few practical issues, written questionnaires do not pose many ethical issues. This is because the respondent can remain anonymous if they so wish and they can also leave any intrusive or sensitive issues blank. When studying working class underachievement this is a particular advantage because some pupils may be embarrassed to discuss their home lives, particularly if they live in **poverty**.

Para 4 – ethical issues discussed – anonymity developed with reference to topic

FIVE – Even though there are relatively few ethical uses, the researcher must be aware of harm to respondents. For working class children there may be a stigma attached, and for sensitive issues such as home life, the use of questionnaires can still cause distress. Nevertheless, the fact that respondents are not obligated to respond **means this ethical problem is easily overcome**.

Para 5 – further developed with reference to topic

SIX – From the perspective of a positivist, written questionnaires are a useful way to investigate working class underachievement because the data produced when using standardised questions is quantitative and high in reliability. This makes questionnaires useful for investigating working class underachievement because it allows cause and effect relationships to be established, for example whether or the not the structure of the education system reproduces working class underachievement, or whether there is a correlation between family background and achievement. However, the nature of written questionnaires can be an issue if the researcher's meaning is imposed onto the questionnaire so it is another fact that must be taken into account

Para 6 – various positivist concepts – good on usefulness of WC – but not unique to topic

SEVEN – From the point of view of an interpretivist, written questionnaires are not useful when investigating working class underachievement because the data lacks validity. While questionnaires may be able to identify that factors such as material deprivation may influence the achievement of working class pupils, it does not get to the heart of the matter. Written questionnaires do not investigate the meanings that

pupils may attach to the reasons they may underachieve, and do not let the respondent communicate their ideas freely. Because of this lack of validity interpretivists do not favour the use of written questionnaires to investigate working class underachievement.

Para 7 – interpretivism and validity – not related to topic specifically (generic)

EIGHT – Ultimately, written questionnaires can be useful to investigate working class underachievement because the data is easy to analyse and compare, which may be useful as the data could be used over time to look at whether government policies put in place to reduce working class underachievement really work. Not only that but they are representative, so generalisations about the wider population can be made in a way that methods favoured by interpretivists cannot.