Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCE

PSYCHOLOGY (WPS01)

PAPER 01: Social and Cognitive Psychology

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General Comments

This paper covered a range of question types allowing candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. All questions were attempted equally across the paper although there were several blank responses in individual papers, suggesting that the candidates need to develop a greater awareness both of exam skills and timing under exam conditions.

The mathematical assessment questions were generally answered well but candidates must ensure that they take care when plotting graphs. It is important that titles are detailed and that both axes are labelled fully and completed with units of measurement. Generic responses still pose a problem for candidates. This is especially apparent in questions asking for strengths or weaknesses. Candidates must also be familiar with specific points about studies and theories. At times, responses were not expressed clearly using the accepted terminology. However, it is encouraging to see that candidates are engaging more fully with scenario based or applied questions. These should be read carefully and given extra attention so that candidates can extract all the information given to elaborate their answers

Candidates showed equal levels of ability across both the Social and Cognitive part of the paper. Candidates must work on their understanding of key terms and concepts. It would also be beneficial to analyse the different command terms so that questions are answered as intended. In the essay questions, only a very few candidates were confident with justification of evidence and building up logical chains of reasoning to support a balanced conclusion.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Candidates should identify clear strengths and weaknesses of theories and studies.

Candidates should learn the key studies in detail

Candidates must read a question carefully so that they answer the question asked.

Candidates should avoid generic statements and try to make specific points.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Q1a

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding question which required the results of Milgram's variation study – experiment 13. Many candidates had some knowledge of the result of this variation, although very few candidates expressed it clearly. Statements were often vague, for example, 'the percentage of obedience fell to 20% or dropped from 65%'. The statement should have been expanded to say that 20% went up to 450V or that the 65% obedience rate came from Milgram's base-line experiment. Other details such as all participants shocked the learner up to 90V were not used as results. Although there is considerable overlap between Milgram's experiments it is important to know the defining details.

Q1b

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 identification and an AO3 justification/exemplification question. The candidates were required to give a strength and weakness of Milgram's experiment 13. These could relate to any part of the variation experiment and thus many candidates focused on ethical considerations as a weakness, for example, deception. Answers were inclined to be minimalist with no expansion of a justification. As is often the case with responses detailing a strength of a study, the answers tend to be generic and could relate to any laboratory experiment rather than Milgram's specifically. Many responses just contained a description of a point without indication of whether it was a strength or weakness.

Examiner Tip

Make sure that strength and weakness are made specific to a study.

Q2a

Question Introduction.

There are two A02 application marks for this question. Some candidates are still unsure about the difference between a directional and non-directional hypothesis. Many responses that had included direction failed to mention both levels of the IV (before and after Dr Foster's talk) and thus did not gain credit. Very few candidates operationalised the DV – the measurement was fruit per week.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must be able to operationalise variables fully

Q2b(i)

Most candidates answered this confidently and correctly identified random sampling as the method used here.

Q2b(ii)

Question Introduction.

There was an A02 application mark and an AO3 Justification mark. Candidates had to identify a strength of random sampling and then apply it to the scenario of Dr Foster. Many answers were generic and little attempt was seen to relate responses back to the scenario.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must relate their answer to the scenario

Q2c

Question Introduction

There was an A02 mark available for the calculation. This was completed successfully in most cases and candidates did round up the answer to one decimal place.

Q2d

Question Introduction

There was an A02 application mark and an A03 justification mark for this mathematical interpretation question. Candidates were required to use the data provided to support a conclusion. The histogram was often misinterpreted with candidates thinking that the x axis represented number of weeks or even the

age of the participants rather than pieces of fruit. A simplistic conclusion was often reached that more fruit was eaten after Dr Foster's talk and some candidates went on to develop this with the idea that Dr Foster was an authority figure in his field.

Q3

Question Introduction

This question had two knowledge and understanding marks and two justification/exemplification marks. Knowledge of how culture affects conformity was limited. Many responses only detailed different forms of conformity with no reference to culture. The most common response recognised collectivist and individualist cultures and made some reference to conformity. A minority used Smith and Bond as a justification point and even fewer used Asch's research to link to collectivist/individualist societies. Many answers were irrelevant to the question. Candidates did not express their ideas very clearly. Overall answers to this question were disappointing.

Q4

Question Introduction

This was an evaluate question with 4 A01 knowledge and understanding marks and 4 A03 justification/exemplification marks. It was a straightforward and easily accessible question which produced the full range of answers   Many candidates wrote a well-developed essay and focused on reliability and validity issues whilst others made general evaluative points. A common omission was some description of Burger's experiment- it was often reported as a replica of Milgram's study with little elaboration. Rather than specific results a comparison with Milgram was offered. Evaluation was often generic and focused on strengths and weaknesses of experiments rather than specific points. Conclusions were few and far between and many opportunities to develop an argument using logical chains of reasoning were lost.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must develop evaluation points using logical chains of reasoning to produce a conclusion

Cognitive Psychology

Q5a

Question Introduction

There is one AO1 mark here which is a knowledge and understanding mark. Candidates were very uncertain about the aim of Bartlett's study and often referred to the theory of reconstructive memory. Few candidates expressed an aim clearly and responses made vague reference to culture and schema.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should ensure that Key Studies are known in detail

Q5b

Question Introduction

There are two A01 knowledge and understanding marks for stating the results of Bartlett's study. Candidates were more comfortable with this question. The most popular answer talked about transforming content and used canoes reported as boats as an example. Other popular results included shortening, sharpening etc. Again there were many responses which lacked requisite detail to gain credit.

Q5c

Question Introduction

There was an A01 knowledge and understanding mark and one A03 justification/exemplification mark available for this question. An improvement to Bartlett's study was required. Candidates did experience difficulty with this type of question and described a weakness rather than an improvement. Alternatively, they changed the research method completely. Some candidates answered this well by improving the sample in terms of diversity and justifying this improvement. The most popular answer was to arrange a larger sample which did not gain credit.

Examiner Tip

Remember to justify your improvement

Q6a

Question Introduction

Question 6 is a scenario question about an experiment on working memory. Part a is just one mark which is an A02 mark which must be applied to the scenario given. It is good practice to read the scenario thoroughly before answering the questions. In this case the candidate had to identify how the Dependent Variable had been measured. It was a simple question. The expected answer was the time taken to do the task with an appropriate unit of measurement such as seconds. Although many candidates identified time taken as the way of operationalising the DV, there were very few responses which included a unit of measurement. A popular response was 'using stopwatch' A few responses did not show understanding of operationalisation and talked about a standardised procedure.

Examiner Tip

Include the unit of measurement when operationalising a variable whenever possible

Q6b

Question Introduction

Three A02 marks are available for the drawing of a bar chart and the interpretation of data. The bars were largely plotted accurately and gained credit; however, the title lacked detail and the axes were not fully labelled.

Q6c

Question Introduction

There was one application mark for this question which had to relate to the data from scenario and one A03 justification mark. The data was generally recognised as significant and some candidates used the data accurately in their response. Very few candidates actually stated the hypothesis that was to be accepted which is an expectation of this type of question.

Q6d

Question Introduction

Again, there is an A02 application mark, so the response must relate to the scenario, and an A03 justification mark. Identification of a participant variable allowed many possible options – most were acceptable. The scenario included a repeated measures design so fatigue effect was not a participant variable. Some candidates did not appear to understand the term 'participant variable' and related their response to sample size.

Q7a

Question Introduction

This question has one A01 mark for description. Candidates were very unsure of exactly what encoding involved. Many references were made to Baddeley's experiment rather than the Multi Store Model. Responses tended to be lacking in detail and consist of vague comments linking to rehearsal.

Q7b

Question Introduction

This question asked for two strengths so there was an A01 mark for identification of each strength and an A03 mark for justification or exemplification of that strength.

 It is more usual to ask for a strength and weakness and this was the more popular approach which emphasises how important it is to read the question carefully. Some candidates tended to describe the model rather than give evaluative points. Research evidence was used to give support to the model. Candidates must express evidence definitively so that it is clearly relevant to part of the model. Case study evidence, such as HM or Clive Wearing was muddled and rarely related back to either STM or LTM.

Examiner Tip

Read the question carefully

Q8

Question Introduction

This question was an 8 mark open response question which was assessed using the levels based marking criteria. The candidate was expected to discuss reconstructive memory in reference to the scenario of an eye-witness event.

Candidates were very confident in identifying and describing schema as an important factor. Few explained the concept of 'effort after meaning' well. Reconstructive memory was not elaborated well. Application to the scenario was poor – in many cases the candidates repeated the stem of the question. Apart from the fact that the two girls had different schemas of a robbery there was little attempt to apply theories to the scenario. Some candidates attempted to use research (with very limited or no relevance) to support comments. Top mark band answers were quite elusive in this question and limited knowledge and understanding were demonstrated.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should read a scenario very carefully to select points to use in application

Section C

Q9

Question Introduction

This question was a 12-mark open response question which was assessed using the levels- based marking criteria. It is important to note that there is an AO1/A02 and AO3 response required. Thus, candidates were expected to give equal emphasis to knowledge and understanding, application to the context and Justification/exemplification in this answer. Candidates can approach this type of question in a variety of ways.

Most candidates approached the first part of this question confidently although there was evidence that they had not left enough time to complete it fully. Knowledge of the working memory was mostly well-explained and the different parts of the working memory model identified. Most candidates were aware that it is a model of Short Term Memory although there was some confusion. The model was applied to the three patients in the question. Patient A was easily recognised as having a potential phonological loop deficiency and linked clearly to the Working Memory Model. Patient C again was easily identified as not being able to manage a visual and verbal task at the same time whilst he could manage two verbal tasks. Again, this was clearly linked to the different components of the Working Memory Model. Patient B was harder to identify but many candidates recognised the limited duration of the phonological loop. The A03 evidence to support this scenario was not convincingly given. There was the possibility that some candidates had run out of time but there was also evidence that the candidates did not know the supporting evidence and limitations of this model. To achieve the higher marking levels candidates had to include some logical chains of reasoning and reach a balanced conclusion. Many responses attempted a conclusion but it was rarely supported although the question lent itself to a competing argument and candidates had some grasp of

this. Overall candidates achieved solid marks in this question although rarely reaching the top mark bands.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should know evaluation points for a model or theory