Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2024

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Subsidiary Level in Psychology (WPS01) Paper 01: Social and Cognitive Psychology

General Comments

Candidates demonstrated sound psychological knowledge and understanding equally across both the social and cognitive sections of the paper. In most cases, all the questions on the paper were attempted. Any blank responses were not limited to a specific part of the paper suggesting that candidates approached this paper confidently and were able to finish it in the time available.

Mathematical questions involving calculations were generally completed well but it is recommended that candidates read the instruction carefully, so they present their answer in the correct form. They should also ensure candidates are aware of the formulae and statistical tables at the front of the paper.

It is pleasing to see a continued improvement in candidates' responses to a scenario. It is, nonetheless, still worth emphasising that when the stimulus in a question includes a scenario, the response must be contextualised and apply psychological knowledge to explain that scenario.

As in previous series, candidates would find it helpful to be conversant with the different command terms and be able to analyse their requirements in a response. Questions involving strengths and weakness often present difficulties and result in generic answers which do not relate to specific details about the study or theory required. In many responses it is not evident why an identified feature is considered as a strength. Candidates are reminded that the term 'explain' requires an AO3 justification/exemplification point.

Essay questions allowed candidates to demonstrate their awareness of psychological knowledge and understanding. In these longer response questions, detailed knowledge is also required to allow thorough and accurate discussion. Additionally, candidates are encouraged to develop their chains of reasoning in the evaluation. An awareness of competing arguments is necessary to access the higher marking levels in evaluate or assess questions. Only a few candidates gave sufficient justification of evidence to attempt balanced conclusions.

Paper Summary

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

- Candidates must recognise the command terms to enable them to give an appropriate response.
- Candidates must learn content thoroughly so that they can incorporate accurate details into their answers.
- Candidates must avoid generic responses and provide specific responses when answering strength and weakness questions about studies.
- Candidates should consider balanced conclusions and competing arguments in longer essay questions.
- Candidates should practise calculating statistical tests.
- Candidates should read the question carefully to identify the format required for the calculation.
- Candidates must ensure they know the different experiment designs.

1a

Question Introduction

There are two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks for the results of Milgram's Experiment 13. Although this question gave an easy start to the paper many candidates gave a vague answer and did not gain credit. Some candidates did not distinguish clearly between Milgram's Experiment 13 and his baseline experiment and offered generalised comments such as 'the level of obedience was less'. To gain credit the response should include the actual figure and specify details of the voltage. There was some confusion between results from the variation studies as well. Some candidates confidently stated that only 20% went up to 450V and achieved 1 mark. No other statistics were mentioned.

1b

Question Introduction

This question has an AO1 knowledge and understanding mark and an AO3 justification mark for each strength and weakness. Many responses failed to reference Experiment 13 or the ordinary man and gave generic strengths and weaknesses from Milgram's experiment, such as 'it was reliable because it had a standardised procedure' or 'lacking validity as it was an artificial task'. Candidates rarely attempted to follow through with an AO3 exemplification point.

Examiner's tip: Candidates must avoid generic responses and provide specific responses when answering strength and weakness questions about studies.

2a

Question Introduction

This question had one AO1 knowledge mark for identifying a reason why individual differences could affect conformity and one AO3 justification mark for explaining it. Candidates were aware of various personality traits and could identify these. The most popular response involved locus of control. Clear points were made with internal and external locus of control, but other candidates only discussed high and low locus of control which did not gain credit.

2b

Question Introduction

This question has two AO1 marks for identification of a reason why culture can affect conformity and two AO3 marks for justification of those reasons. Individualistic and collectivist culture proved the most popular choice of reasons, allowing candidates to gain both description marks if they indicated whether this led to increased or decreased conformity. Occasionally, Bond and Smith's study was quoted in support of the reason but mostly no AO3 justification was provided although countries such as the USA were given as examples. Candidates are reminded that it is important to know specific research evidence to develop their answers.

3

Question Introduction

Candidates engaged well with this application question and used their knowledge of different theories to produce some good answers which explained Archie's obedience in this scenario. Agency theory was a popular choice with knowledge of an authority figure and the autonomous and agentic states. Other candidates used social power theory including expert power, legitimate power and coercive power skilfully within the scenario. Some candidates neatly combined different interpretations to access the marks.

4a

Question Introduction

There is one AO2 mark for a correct calculation of a ratio. Most candidates calculated the ratio correctly; however surprisingly many did not. The answer should be expressed in the lowest form so 6:4 is incorrect and so is 1:5:1.

Examiner's tip:

Candidates should read the question carefully to identify the format required for the calculation

4b

Question Introduction

There is one mark for the correct calculation of a mean which most candidates achieved. Responses should be given to one decimal place and candidates are reminded to check the instructions carefully.

5

Question Introduction

This is a levels-based question testing AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 justification/exemplification with equal emphasis. Candidates are required to assess research evidence in conformity. Research by Asch and Moscovici was used to illustrate aspects of conformity and candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding, although some also used the contemporary studies Yi Huang and Haun effectively. Evaluation tended to be generic and was based on standard points about laboratory experiments. Mostly candidates attempted a conclusion albeit superficial but struggled to assess competing arguments and did not develop chains of reasoning fully. A few candidates presented a well-constructed essay with good evidence and considered how this research had developed our understanding of the effect of conformity on human behaviour. Less confident responses gave an overview of types of conformity and little or no reference to research limiting marks to Level 1.

Cognitive Psychology

Q6a

Question Introduction

There are two AO2 application marks awarded for descriptions of how the phonological loop could be used to help Darius remember the map. This question produced variable responses some of which outlined the workings of the phonological loop without focusing on the scenario. Most candidates did apply their answer to Eliza's situation and achieved one mark. More confident candidates recognized the phonological loop's responsibility for auditory information and suggested reading names from the map out loud. Where candidates elaborated on the role of the phonological loop in subvocal rehearsal they usually accessed both marks.

Q6b

Question Introduction

There are two AO2 application marks awarded for descriptions of how the visuospatial sketchpad could be used to help Darius remember the map. As in 6a some candidates described the working of the VSS and failed to apply it to the scenario. Again, most candidates made a reference to Eliza and Darius and suggested that he should look at the map regularly. Other candidates were more creative suggesting the use of colour or 3D models or even taking a tour so that different features of the VSS were considered and achieved both marks.

7a

Question Introduction

This question has two application AO2 marks for an appropriate description of how Melanie could use independent groups in her study. Some candidates were unsure of designs and left the question blank but the candidates who understood what an independent design was often achieved all the marks. A few candidates tried to describe a repeated measures scenario whilst others just talked about interference tasks without fully relating to the scenario.

Examiner tip:

Candidates must ensure they know the different experiment designs.

7b

Question Introduction

This question has one AO1 knowledge and understanding mark for identifying a weakness of a laboratory study and one AO3 justification mark for explain why it is a weakness. The most frequent response was based on the idea of low ecological validity as it is carried out in an artificial environment. Occasionally, candidates mentioned demand characteristics. Most responses achieved the AO1 mark. Candidates who elaborated on the consequences of these factors on participants behaviour achieved both marks.

Examiner's tip:

Candidates should state why a feature is considered a weakness.

8ai-ii

Question Introduction

This question had four AO2 maths marks for calculating the T value and filling in a table correctly for the Wilcoxon test. Most candidates could complete the difference column accurately but even here some candidates were confused about signs or omitted them completely. Countless unfinished or inaccurate responses illustrated that candidates are not confident with ranking scores. Even at this stage some candidates could not work out the sum of positive and negative ranks despite the guidance in the front part of the paper. A few candidates achieved four marks here with easy distinguishable stages.

Candidates also struggled with part aii where there was an AO3 mark available for an accurate determination of whether the results were significant or not. Often answers appeared to guess significance or no significance with no justification at all. Many candidates could not use the tables to determine a correct critical value whilst others attempted to compare their result to 0.05. Candidates who were confident with this procedure clearly stated that there was no significance at $p \leq 0.05$ including both the calculated value and the critical value. If a candidate had an incorrect calculated value in the first part but correctly determined whether the results were significant or not they were credited with the mark.

Examiner tip:

Candidates should practise calculating statistical tests.

8b

Question Introduction

There is one AO2 application mark and one AO3 justification mark available for each improvement that relates to the scenario. Improvement questions are often tricky as candidates tend to outline a weakness rather than detail an improvement. If an improvement is suggested it is often generic and does not fully relate to the scenario discussed. Some candidates tried to change the experiment completely by suggesting Leonardo used letters or words rather than numbers. Most improvements involved changing the number of participants to improve generalisability; however, without mentioning how the sample would be changed (for examples to include ages from 18-50 or to include both men and women). This is a generic point which gained no credit. Numbers alone will not necessarily improve generalisability.

Q9

Question Introduction

This question was an 8-mark open response question which was assessed using the levels-based marking criteria. There were 4 AO1 and 4 AO2 marks available. The candidate had to refer to the scenario and the multi store model of memory in an answer. Some candidates provided good evidence of the theory in the appropriate context and used different parts of the theory to illustrate the girls' behaviour. Other candidates showed good general knowledge of the theory but applied this quite superficially by relating most of the events to a lack of attention or distraction so that the memory did not pass into the STM. Several candidates muddled the multi store model with working memory model and based their answer on this. It is encouraging that most candidates did refer to the scenario in some way.

Section C

Q10

Question Introduction

Q10   This question was a 12-mark open response question which was assessed using the levels-based marking criteria. There are six AO1 and six AO3 marks thus candidates are expected to give equal emphasis to knowledge/understanding and justification/exemplification. Most candidates attempted this question although there were a few blank responses. As always, some candidates muddled the studies and described Bartlett or Schmolck's study. Responses were varied – either candidates knew the studies well or just remembered a few details. The most popular choice by far was Saachi's study. In the weaker responses, candidates knew the number and nationality of the participants in the sample as well as the procedure of this study which led into some superficial evaluation of reliability and generalisability. More confident responses recounted details about the questionnaire, photos different conditions, and results. A precise understanding of the aim of this study was infrequent. Responses based on Darling's study were also varied. Confident responses gave good detail of the procedure, interference tasks and results but other responses suggested a lack of understanding of the procedure and aim.

For both studies the evaluation showed limited development of logical chain of reasoning and often the candidate discussed reliability or validity in generic terms. Essays where the AO1 points were integrated with AO3 justification achieved a more focused approach allowing a balanced conclusion rather than just a repeat of strengths and weaknesses.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should develop AO3 points to provide a logical chain of reasoning in the longer essay questions.