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GCSE SOCIOLOGY

B673/01/CS Applying Sociological Research Techniques

Duration: 1 hour



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Investigation 1 – a study by a male deputy head teacher in a secondary school in Birmingham in 2017.

My experience as a teacher is that girls get better exam results than boys. I wonder therefore why women are paid less than men and do not have the best jobs.

My role in school is to monitor discrimination in education. I joined a local group of teachers who have similar roles in their schools so that we could work together to research this. I am particularly interested in how girls and boys are doing in school and how this affects their future. Therefore, my part of the research is on gender in school.

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Hypothesis

‘Girls now outperform boys in school but this does not lead to their success in high paid jobs such as in science and engineering.’

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Secondary sources

Historical sources of information can be very useful. I used some old books as my starting point. One book looked at the development of girls’ education from the middle ages to the 1970s. I found that before the law made education compulsory, rich families sent sons to schools such as Eton and Harrow (built in the 16th century) and employed governesses to teach their daughters at home. Before 1870, there was no discrimination in education between the sexes of the poorest children as they all had to go to work.

15

Source 1

Part 1

In the 1700s the church set up charity schools so the working class could read the Bible. Teachers were told:

‘As soon as the boys can read well, teach them writing and arithmetic to prepare them for Services or apprenticeships. Girls should learn to read, knit their stockings and gloves, sew, make and mend clothes. Some may learn to write.’

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Part 2

A governess was a servant, paid little more than a housemaid. One advert for a governess said:

‘She must be a person of good character and cheerful. She must be skilled in the French, Italian and German languages, be a good musician and capable of teaching the piano and singing well. Skills in drawing and painting are desired.’

(I assume these are what her pupils were expected to learn.)

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Part 3

By the end of the 1800s there were some secondary schools for middle class girls. They aimed to train good mothers and home makers. They did not study domestic subjects as they came from homes which had servants. Lessons involved memorising facts from Geography and History and paragraphs from famous writers and poets. Science was not thought to be of use to girls and their schools could not afford science labs or equipment.

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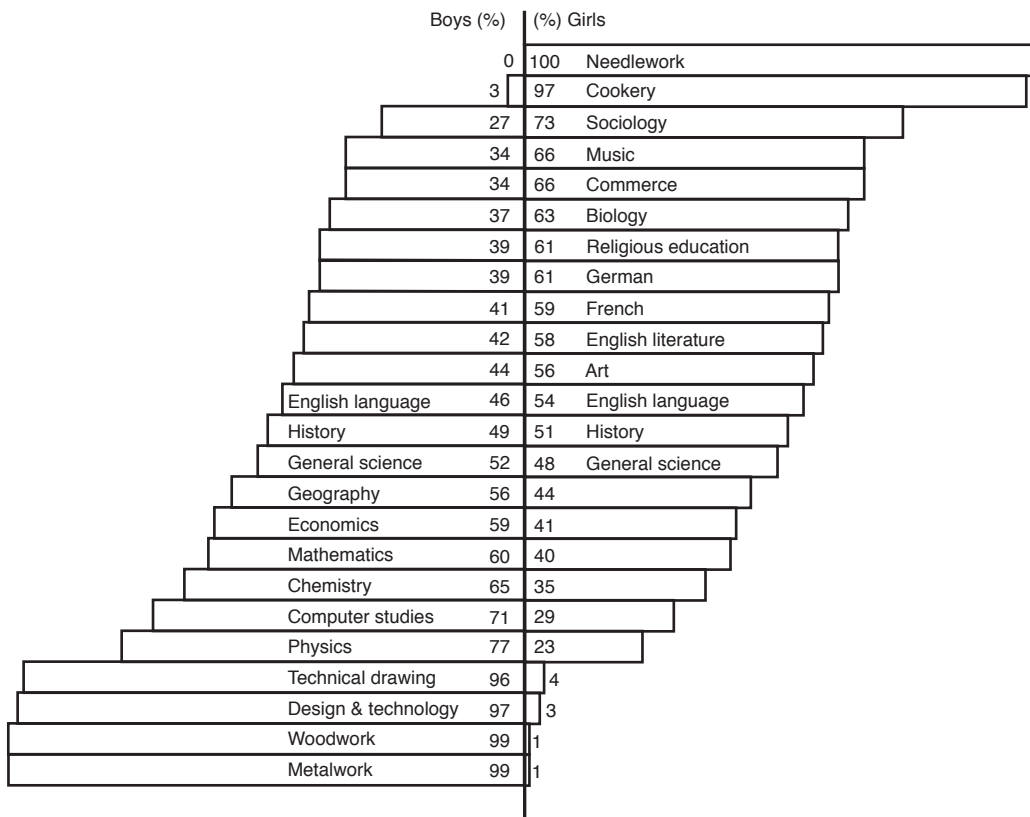
Source: adapted from a book on the history of girls’ education – 1974

Because of the National Curriculum for pupils up to 16, boys and girls usually study the same subjects. However, it has not always been like this.

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Source 2

Part 4

The % distribution of boys and girls in O level subjects 1980

Part 5

GCSE results 2016

- 71.3 per cent of girls were awarded at least a C grade, compared with just 62.4 per cent of boys
- a higher percentage of girls achieved A* or A grades: 24.1 per cent compared with 16.8 per cent for boys
- girls performed better than boys in every school subject apart from maths
- the most gender imbalanced subjects were art and computing. There were 2 girls taking art for every 1 boy and 4 boys taking computing for every 1 girl.

Part 6

Percentage of A level students entering for maths and science A levels by gender 2016

	Girls	Boys
Maths	16.7	31.0
Further Maths	2.1	6.5
Biology	17.7	13.2
Chemistry	12.0	14.3
Physics	3.6	15.5
Computing	0.3	3.3

Source: adapted from GOV.UK

Changes in education for girls (and also for working class boys) have come about because people have campaigned for equal rights and fairness. To understand this I watched a short documentary on the internet about Malala Yousafzai. 65

Source 3

Internet documentary – ‘The Making of Malala’ (2013)

Malala lived in the Swat Valley in Pakistan. She was interviewed first when aged 11 in 2009 when the Taliban were bombing schools for girls and then banned education for girls. Some schools continued in secret and Malala said her dream was to be a doctor. 70

The film makers interviewed and recorded her again in 2012. The Taliban were no longer in control and girls were able to go to school. Although only 14, Malala became well known on TV for speaking out in support of girls’ education. Later that year the Taliban tried to kill Malala and two of her friends while they were on the school bus. Malala was shot in the head and was flown from Pakistan to Birmingham for surgery. She recovered and has become a powerful voice for the right of girls to be educated. She makes speeches to world leaders. Malala was the youngest person to be awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2014. She now aims to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan. 75

Source 4

80

Part 7

‘The Secret Life of 5 Year Olds’, Channel 4, January 2017

The documentary set up a ‘fly on the wall’ situation. A group of five-year-old boys were observed and recorded with hidden cameras, playing and taking part in tasks. The focus of this was on gender. This was repeated with the same size group of girls. The children were from different parts of the UK. Their parents had put forward the children to take part and were shown at home being interviewed with the children. 85

In a follow up programme, five boys and five girls were selected from the first groups and were observed interacting together. Some conclusions matched other research done:

- gender stereotypes affected children by the age of six
- girls felt they were less talented than boys.

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Later, one of the observers and producer of the documentary, Professor Paul Howard-Jones, an educational neuroscientist at Bristol University (Person A) and Professor Gemma Moss from the International Literacy Centre, UCL (Person B) were interviewed on the Victoria Derbyshire Programme, BBC 2, January 27th. They were asked what they thought were the reasons why girls felt they were less talented. 95

I have written (and shortened) the main points each person made.

Part 8

Interviews with the two professors	
Person A	100
Girls do think they are less talented. One reason is because there are definite biological differences between boys and girls. However, at the age of six girls have better motor skills, social skills and theory of mind. Although girls outperform boys, as shown on the programme, girls think boys have 'bigger brains'. If we measure the hormone levels of babies we can predict which toys a child will play with. Girls with higher levels of testosterone are more likely to play with cars and trains.	105
Gender stereotypes come from culture. Children develop gender stereotypes from adults and from their culture and norms. Girls are 'super beings' so boys feel they need to fight back. Boys push forward the idea that girls are inferior. We need to make sure girls and boys are mixed together so they can learn about all the different ranges of gender and therefore reduce gender stereotyping.	110
However, we need to remember that within a group of boys there is a bigger range of differences than between the group of boys and a group of girls. What each individual child needs is not based on whether they are a boy or a girl.	
Person B	115
(She laughs when person A talks about biological differences.)	
The reasons and where it comes from are not important. Culture changes and expectations of women have changed. Women are far more successful now, even more than a few years ago. More women than men now go to university.	
We need to avoid gender stereotyping. More important is that we need to look at the differences between boys themselves and between girls themselves. The view of children who think 'boys are brilliant' is not good for the less successful boys who are struggling to learn to read. They will not admit to their problems and are less likely to ask for help. Girls of six believe that girls are more likely to achieve in school. By thinking 'boys are brilliant', it makes girls try harder.	120
Teachers need to focus more on individuals and their ability rather than gender.	125

Primary research**Observation in the Playground**

In her study in 1977, Ann Marie Wolpe found that boys took over much of the space around school with their physical activities such as playing football. Girls were pushed to the edges of the space. This could help to explain why males dominate the top jobs in work. I decided to see if this is the same in schools today. 130

My plan was to observe every 50 minute lunchtime break for a week. The students would not be surprised to see me as they would think I was on playground duty. The only difference is that I had to have a clipboard so I could record what I saw. I decided not to use an observation sheet but just to write down what I could see boys and girls doing. I also managed to take some photos with my phone. 135

Unfortunately, it was raining on the Wednesday, and on Friday of that week I had to do the weekly detention duty. Therefore I had to use two days, Monday and Tuesday, in the next week. Some days I was delayed by students wanting help with their work. However, apart from times when students wanted to chat to me and having to break up a fight, my research went well. 140

My results seemed to be similar to the results of the earlier study:

- boys were more physical and ran around more than girls (other than the girls' football team who were getting in a bit of practice)
- boys climbed up structures such as walls and gates whenever possible so they were higher 145
- girls were more likely to be on the paths and round the edges, chatting in twos or small groups and looking at their phones (probably social media sites). There again, there were some boys doing this (probably playing video games).

To add to the research I have asked two other teachers to do the same in their schools which are nearby. Although not as good as a random or systematic sample, this should provide a good set of results. 150

Conclusion

My research is not yet complete and there are so many factors which can affect a person's performance in school. I would like to have done a longitudinal study to give me more information but this would not be practical. I am sure I will have some useful results to pass on to the Head at the end of the school year. 155

Investigation 2 – A study by a female A Level sociology student in Lancashire in 2017.

A Functionalist sociologist view of education is a popular one. Many people think all students have an equal chance to succeed but the most talented students will do better. Working class student results are lower than those of the middle class. This would mean the working class are less able. I am not so sure about this. 160

Much of the research into social class and education has focused on either the wealth or the culture of each class as reasons for their success or failure. I have decided to study this in a different way. I guess the way I see it would be more of a Marxist sociologist view. I think working class children do less well because the rich and powerful people keep them in their 'place' and stop them from achieving. Most Marxists look at the economy and businesses to see how the rich treat the working class. To me, people in power could be teachers and the media, not just the rich. 165

My aim is to look at the attitudes that people in power hold and how this might affect working class achievement. 170

I decided to read one of the most important studies in sociology.

Source 5

'Learning to Labour', Paul Willis (1977)

Paul Willis studied a group of 12 white working class boys during their last year and a half in school and their first few months at work in a factory. He carried out unstructured interviews and observations in one secondary school in Birmingham. He said the school was typical of working class schools in the UK. He aimed to find out why 'working class kids get working class jobs'. He identified two groups of pupils: 175

One group (who called themselves the 'lads') were working class boys who were anti-school and also showed strongly racist and sexist attitudes. They tried to drink and smoke to be like their dads and thought that manual work, such as building, was far more important than mental work. Seeing as society is run by rich and powerful people, the lads thought no matter how hard they tried, they would still remain far less successful than middle class students. 180

The other group were called the ear'oles by the lads. The lads disliked the ear'oles because they followed the school rules, respected their teachers, and worked hard. The lads did not just dislike ear'oles, but looked down on them. This was because the lads believed that the ear'oles were wasting their time at school by not being able to have fun. 185

Willis found the attitudes and behaviour by the lads in school continued into their work in the factory. They skived off whenever they could and told Willis about a time they urinated in the boss's teapot before making his tea. 'Having a laff' was important in both school and work as a means of dealing with boredom and authority. 190

The lads rejected school. They learned to put up with boredom and accept they would have low-skill and low-paid jobs. In fact they chose these jobs so they could 'be like their dads'.

I am not sure what to make of Willis' study. On the one hand it could be said the lads were labelled as working class and therefore would not be successful. There again, they seemed to want working class jobs and felt the factory was where they belonged. They also felt their teachers kind of looked up to them but maybe this was Willis' interpretation. 195

I decided to look at a different book for some ideas.

Source 6

200

'Chavs: the Demonization of the Working Class', Owen Jones (2012)

"It's sad that Woolworth's is closing. Where will all the chavs buy their Christmas presents?"

Jones starts his book with this joke which he heard at a dinner party and which led to him writing the book. Jones argues that in Britain, the working class has become an object of fear and ridicule. From Little Britain's Vicky Pollard to the demonization of Jade Goody, media and politicians dismiss the poorer people in society as worthless, criminal and ignorant. 205

He looks at the negative treatment by the media of the neighbours of 11 year old Shannon Matthews who went missing. After two weeks, the case had received only a third of the media coverage the middle class McCann family had received two weeks after Madeleine went missing. The working class community in West Yorkshire where Shannon lived searched and campaigned to find her. Later, her mother and step uncle were convicted of drugging and hiding her in order to claim a £50 000 police reward. The media had made out all the people on the estate were the same as the Matthews family. 210

Jones says the most deprived working class have become stereotyped by one, hate-filled word: chavs. He looks at how the working class has gone from 'salt of the earth' to 'scum of the earth'. He says the chav caricature put forward by the media is based on ignorance and prejudice. 215

He argues the chav stereotype is used by governments as a way of avoiding dealing with poverty and social problems. He is very critical of the media and the politicians who he says help to create inequality and class-hatred.

Source 7

220

Pygmalion in the Classroom – a study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968)

This was a study done in an elementary school in the USA. The researchers wanted to find out if a teacher's expectations of students would have an effect on their achievement. This meant that if a teacher made it clear he or she expected high achievement, the student would do well. On the other hand, if the teacher had low expectations, the student would not do well in school. Sociologists call this the self-fulfilling prophecy. 225

The researchers set up an experiment. In May 1964 all the pupils were given a test of ability by their classroom teachers. The teachers were told the test was to predict which pupils would put on an academic 'spurt'. This was not true. In September, each teacher was given a list of names of pupils. They were told these pupils were the 'spurters'. However, the names were just picked at random and the pupils were of mixed ability. The children were tested again in January 1965, May 1965, and May 1966. 230

The results showed these pupils had increased their scores more than the other pupils. The study concluded that a teacher's expectations did affect the performance of pupils.

Researchers since then have copied this study but have never been able to prove it again. However, most sociologists do think teacher expectations do have an effect. 235

Primary research

My secondary research made me wonder if teachers' expectations are based on social class. I would really like to repeat the experiment done by Rosenthal and Jacobson but it would not be practical. Instead, I decided to observe two maths classes in my sixth form. One class was an upper sixth A level further maths class. The other was a GCSE re-sit class. I observed each class for an hour. 240

I guess what I did was partly overt and partly covert observation. I do not study maths so it was obvious I was observing. However, the teachers thought I was observing the students as part of my sociology course. What I was really doing was observing the teachers! I made notes on what I thought was important. 245

My results showed some interesting comments made by the teachers:

GCSE teacher	A level teacher	
Come on class. You can't afford to fail again.	There are some great mathematicians in this class.	250
We have done this before. You ought to understand it by now.	Well done everyone. These calculations are really difficult but you have made them look easy.	
Ok Sam. We don't expect an A grade but you should be able to manage a C.	You people are the most intelligent students in this school.	255

I think my results supported the research done by Rosenthal and Jacobson. I felt the teachers treated the two groups differently and had different expectations.

Conclusion

My study seems to support the idea that people have negative attitudes to the working class. Further research may be able to prove this will have an effect on educational achievement. 260

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