

Markscheme

May 2016

Psychology

Higher level

Paper 3

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Paper 3 markbands

Marks	Level descriptor
0	The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1 to 3	There is an attempt to answer the question, but knowledge and understanding is limited, often inaccurate, or of marginal relevance to the question. The response makes no direct reference to the stimulus material or relies too heavily on quotations from the text.
4 to 7	The question is partially answered. Knowledge and understanding is accurate but limited. Either the command term is not effectively addressed or the response is not sufficiently explicit in answering the question. The response makes limited use of the stimulus material.
8 to 10	The question is answered in a focused and effective manner and meets the demands of the command term. The answer is supported by appropriate and accurate knowledge and understanding of qualitative research methodology. The response demonstrates a critical understanding of qualitative research methodology applied to the stimulus material.

1. Explain **one or more** possible effects of participant expectations in this qualitative study. **[10]**

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

The command term “explain” requires candidates to give a detailed account of how participant expectations could influence the results of the study and give reasons or causes for why they are relevant by referring to details of the study.

Responses that use the term “experiment” as a generic term for “study” should not be penalized.

Participant expectations (or participant bias, the Hawthorne effect, demand characteristics) can be described as factors that influence the outcome of the research study.

The study takes place in a naturalistic setting and data is collected by the researcher who is herself a therapist working in the hospice where the study was conducted. In spite of this natural setting, it is possible that effects of participant expectations could be observed. Participant expectations in the context of this study could include, but are not limited to:

- Participants gave informed consent so it is possible they know the aim of the study. This could mean that there is a risk that participants change their behaviour because they try to guess what the researcher expects the outcome to be in this study in relation to using groups in occupational therapy. Participants could, for example, act in certain ways to “please the researcher” – or they may not want to reveal how much they actually suffer (social desirability effect). Factors such as these could bias the results. However, in this study, the research is taking place in a natural setting and participants may forget they are part of a study because data collection takes place as a natural part of the occupational therapy.
- Participants bring individual perceptions, emotions or ideas that influence the research process and the results. In this study, participants may actually believe that interacting with other patients during occupational therapy provides them with an opportunity to discuss their personal situation with people who are in the same situation as themselves. Such positive expectations could come true (self-fulfilling prophecy) and the researcher would not be able to know if a positive experience was actually due to group therapy or as a result of expectations.
- Participants in the focus group interviews could influence each other (conformity) so that the researcher does not have an accurate picture of what certain participants actually think.

Candidates may explain one possible effect of participant expectations in order to demonstrate depth of knowledge, or may explain a larger number of participant expectations in order to demonstrate breadth of knowledge. Both approaches are equally acceptable.

2. Discuss the use of the case study in this qualitative study (for example, the data collection methods used).

[10]

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

The command term “discuss” requires candidates to offer a considered and balanced review of the use of the case study in this study. Conclusions should be supported by appropriate knowledge of the use of a case study in qualitative research.

Responses that use the term “experiment” as a generic term for “study” should not be penalized.

A case study can be described as an in-depth investigation and analysis of a case, for example related to human experience as in this study. The purpose of this case study is to describe the experience of occupational therapy from the point of view of the participants, who are terminally ill, in order to investigate whether or not they could benefit more from this activity by being in groups rather than being alone.

Discussion related to the use of the case study in this particular study could include, but is not limited to:

- The case study is useful if a researcher wants to explore a sensitive case in depth, as in this study where people were very ill and vulnerable.
- The aim of the study was to find ways to improve occupational therapy for terminally ill patients in a hospice. The participants were sampled by purposive sampling as they had to fit the selection criteria, which were “being terminally ill and in a hospice”. Generalization may be difficult unless the findings are corroborated by similar findings.
- A case study produces rich data because several methods are often used (method triangulation). This case study used two data collection methods (overt participant observation and focus group interviews) in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the participants’ situations.
- Case studies are often longitudinal as in this study. This allows the researcher to collect data over time (data triangulation) and compare them. This in-depth knowledge would allow occupational therapists in the hospice to learn more about their clients’ true needs so that they can improve the service for the terminally ill patients.

In this case study the researchers decided to use **participant observations** and **focus group interviews (that is, method triangulation)** to collect data. Discussion of the use of the two data collection methods in this particular case study could include, but is not limited to:

- Participant observations: gives the opportunity to study sensitive issues in more depth, thereby providing richer data. However, the researcher could lose objectivity, as it is difficult to keep a balance between involvement and detachment. This could be controlled with researcher triangulation, which is also used during analysis of the data in this case study.
- Focus group interviews: give the opportunity to explore the participants’ experiences of being in a group. This enables the discussion of sensitive issues, which could be important in combination with data from the observations. However, the researcher should not ignore that participants may conform or are victim to the social desirability effect in a focus group.

Responses could address the use of the case study method in this study and/or the data collection methods used. Both approaches are equally acceptable.

3. Explain the use of reflexivity in this qualitative study.

[10]

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

The command term “explain” requires candidates to give a detailed account of how reflexivity was used in this study and give reasons or causes by referring to details of the study.

Responses that use the term “experiment” as a generic term for “study” should not be penalized.

Reflexivity is a strategy used by qualitative researchers to examine how a researcher’s own subjectivity and choice of methods may influence the findings in order to increase credibility. This approach acknowledges that a researcher may be biased towards the findings because he or she perceives and interprets data through his or her own lens (subjectivity).

Candidates may argue that based on the stimulus material, it seems that personal reflexivity was used in the study (lines 14–15: The researcher recorded her own thoughts and feelings...).

Personal reflexivity to control for bias could for example involve:

- The researcher examining her own values, experiences and beliefs, and how these could affect the research process, eg in terms of specific decisions such as what to focus on in observing group interactions or how to facilitate the focus group interviews.
- Thinking about how this particular research has affected the researcher professionally considering she herself worked at the hospice.
- A field diary with reflective comments could give an inside view of the researcher’s approach and thoughts during the research process so that her decisions would be documented.
- The researcher showing the results of the content analysis of the field diary as well as the original data to external researchers for critical comments could limit bias and increase credibility.

Candidates may argue that the researcher could also apply **epistemological reflexivity**, which involves examining the way in which knowledge has been generated in the study, eg she could examine whether the focus of the study has limited what could possibly be found out about the role of groups in occupational therapy for patients. She could also consider whether she could use alternative methods to collect data or analyse the data. Reflections such as these encourage any qualitative researcher to examine whether the results of the study are truly reflecting the participants’ views or rather those of the researcher.

Candidates may explain how reflexivity was used without using the term “personal reflexivity” or “epistemological reflexivity”. This is perfectly acceptable as long as they give a satisfactory explanation of the use of reflexivity.
