How to assess paper 3 answers

Read the sample questions and answers set out below. Then read the mark bands and try to place the answers within the mark bands. Explain why you have placed each answer in the mark band you have chosen.

Two researchers carried out a case study of a group of young boys living in a socially deprived area who had problems in relation to educational achievement. Young people in this area are at risk for dropping out of school and becoming unemployed. There is also a substantial risk of criminality and substance misuse. Generally, there are negative expectations and young people are easily drawn into a culture of underachievement. One of the key problems in the community with regard to young people is the lack of facilities and activities, so adolescents often hang around the streets.

A local organization wanted to set up a project to promote positive change. Two researchers joined a group of local community workers doing street work to establish a relationship of trust with the adolescents. This allowed the researchers to conduct some initial observations. They found that the young boys were bored and did not know what to do besides hanging out with their friends. The researchers conducted a focus-group interview with the young boys to find out how they perceived their own situation and what they would be interested in doing. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researchers read and reread the transcript. The data were coded and the researchers carried out an inductive content analysis on the interview data. An overall theme appeared to be a lack of belief in future possibilities. Subthemes were: no interest in schoolwork, no trust in the school system, conflict with adults, and interest in sport and hanging out with friends. The researchers also found that the boys were interested in participating in sports activities if they had the opportunity and if these were free. The researchers used extensive quotes from the participants to support the conclusions reached, in order to ensure credibility, and they also presented the results of their analysis to five of the participants for the same reason.

Based on the researchers’ account, a young sports coach from the area became the peer leader of a basketball group. Two of the researchers undertook participant observations as coaching assistants of all the training sessions during the first year. After two months’ training, the group expressed the wish to take part in competitions. They produced field notes after each training session. The sports coach was able to challenge the boys to work hard and persistently towards the common goal, and he found more young people who were willing to invest time and energy in the project. The team started to participate in competitions and achieved some success.

Those who did not meet regularly for training were not allowed to continue on the team. The researchers followed the development and conducted two more focus-group interviews and face-to-face interviews with the coach after 6 and 12 months. They found that participation in the team had positive effects, not only on the boys’ levels of fitness and motivation, but also on their attitudes to learning, self-esteem, and social competence.

The researchers concluded that the results of this case study show that there is a choice beyond antisocial behaviour and failure, if the community provides concrete opportunities for individuals to develop and realize personal and educational goals.

Sample questions

Answer all three questions.

1. Explain how the case study was used to investigate and find a solution to a social problem.

2. Evaluate the use of focus-group interviews as a data collection method in this case study.

3. Discuss whether the findings from this single case study can be generalized.

Sample answers

1. The case study method was used in the present study to investigate whether it was possible to promote positive change for a group of boys who were in danger of dropping out of school and perhaps developing social problems. The boys had negative expectations about their future, so the aim of the study was to find out whether this could be changed. The case study aimed to explore the participants’ own perception of the situation and possible ways to change in order to ensure that they supported the strategies for change that were eventually set up. The researchers used the focus-group interview at the beginning of the study to encourage the participants to explore the issues that were of importance to them. The findings from the focus-group interviews indicated that participating in sport was a way to promote change, and this was used to set up a basketball team, with a young coach from the area who knew what problems the boys were facing. The researchers followed the basketball team for one year, conducting participant observations. They were able to do this as assistants to the sports coach, and this gave them an opportunity to follow the development of the team and the individual boys over a long period.
Furthermore, the two focus-group interviews after 6 and 12 months gave indications as to what positive changes had taken place as the boys saw it themselves. The interviews with the coach suggested ideas of what he found was important in order to motivate the boys. The case study used method triangulation to study how changes in group culture and beliefs influenced the boys' behaviour and self-esteem long-term, not only in sport, but also in other areas (288 words).

2 The focus group is an important way to collect data as the participants are supposed to interact with each other as they would do outside of the research context. This is more likely to happen if participants already know each other, as they did in this group. The researcher acted as a facilitator and, after introducing the topic of the project, ensured that progress was made in the group. This data collection method is particularly useful in a research project like this one, where the goal is to identify a problem and promote social change in a group. The facilitator can monitor the group discussion and bring the group back on track, suggesting things that they can agree on. This is important because the purpose of the research was that the whole group should be empowered, so the same effect could not be achieved in an individual interview with each of the boys. There is, however, the possibility that the presence of other participants could have resulted in group dynamics such as conformity. Overall, the focus group was a quick and convenient way to collect data from the whole group simultaneously in a natural setting. In this particular case study, it was important for the researchers to explore the participants’ knowledge and experiences in order to gain insight into what they thought and why they thought that way, in order to set up something useful to bring about change in their situation. The researchers used inductive content analysis of the interview transcripts. This allowed them to identify important themes in the way the boys themselves saw their situation (266 words).

3 This single case study uses a small sample that has been carefully selected so it is not statistically representative and this makes it difficult to generalize findings to other populations in traditional (quantitative) ways. However, qualitative researchers argue that if evidence from other studies confirms the findings it may be possible to generalize to other people who are similar to those in the case study. A single case study can also be used for inferential generalization, i.e., the findings may be applicable to similar settings if the researcher has provided a “rich” description of the phenomenon and the context so that other researchers can identify the case and follow the conclusions made based on the documentation, for example quotations from the participants. This is referred to as “transferability”. The use of sport as a way to motivate problem children could be used as a hypothesis on a causal link between specific strategies (sport) and specific outcomes (increased motivation in learning and social competence) but it will remain a hypothesis until it is supported or disproved by further evidence. It has been argued that if the patterns found in a single case study can be found in multiple cases, i.e., they “replicate the pattern” found in the single case study—the theory derived from the single case study gains in robustness. This is also considered to be a way of generalizing in qualitative research (234 words).

Assessment details for paper 3
The framework below only provides a general guide to the assessment of responses to paper 3 questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark band</th>
<th>Level descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>There is an attempt to answer the question, but knowledge and understanding are 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid</td>
<td>The question is partially answered. Knowledge and understanding are 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>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 applied to the stimulus material.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mark bands for paper 3