

Item A

The performance of girls in education over recent years has been one of the success stories of the education system. Up until the 1980s girls lagged behind their male counterparts in terms of achievement, but with the introduction of educational policies that altered the way students were taught and assessed, girls began to overtake their male counterparts in all stages of education, with more females going onto university than males.

However, some sociologists would argue that recent changes to the way students are assessed would favour boys over girls.

Applying material from Item A, analyse TWO reasons for the overachievement of girls over the last 35 years (10)

As stated in Item A, one reason for the improvement of girls over the last 35 years has been changes to the ways that 'students are taught and assessed.' In the late 1980's, assessment criteria were changed for secondary students and GCSEs and coursework were introduced in place of CSEs and O Level examinations which were exam only qualifications. This improved girl's achievement as it was thought that due to their better literacy skills and more conscientious approach to education, girls better organisational and presentation skills meant that they would score higher on the coursework element of their GCSEs than if sitting a high-stakes examination on its own. Boys tend to perform better in high-stakes exams than continuous assessment such as coursework and so girl's achievement increased. However, critics of this approach would suggest that in many cases, coursework amounted for less than half of the marks towards a student's final grade, and in some instances as low as 20%. Therefore, it can be argued that there are other factors determining the improvement of girls in education.

A second reason for the improvement of girls over the last 35 years is the way in which 'students are taught' (Item A). Sociologists, such as Tony Sewell, have suggested that more recently the education system has adopted more feminine approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and that there has been a 'feminisation of education'. The use of more collaborative teaching and learning methods, rather than competitive ones, has suited girls' education better than boys and this has allowed them to be more engaged, motivated

and ultimately achieve higher. It can be argued that the changes in teaching methodologies could also be due to the increase in female teachers within the education system. These female teachers may be more effective in delivering collaborative methods, and therefore in doing so act as a symbol of the education system and how it rewards feminine traits, such as co-operation, collaboration and compassion. However, some sociologists would argue that not all education has become feminised, particularly sciences and maths which remain part of the male gender domain but have seen improvements in female performance in those areas. Furthermore, global comparisons between teaching methods suggest traditional teaching methods, such as those in China, Singapore and Hong Kong, achieve far higher results for girls than the UK system, so perhaps the reasons for girls' achievement are the changes in wider society, such as the rise of feminism.