A Level Psychology Example

Evaluate working memory as a model of memory (10 marks)

The working memory model is a model of active memory. Psychologists may dispute its validity.

One advantage of the working memory model is that it has research support. For example, Baddeley et al’s (1975) lab experiment. He gave all his participants a visual tracking task (a task requiring the visuo-spatial) as well as another task to do. In one condition participants had to describe the angles on a letter F (a visuo-spatial task) and in the other condition participants had to perform a verbal task (using the phonological loop). It was found that describing the letter F and performing visual tracking was much more difficult. This suggests that it is difficult to do two tasks that require the same slave system and easier to do two tasks if they require different slave systems, thus giving evidence for the existence of separate stores. This increases the validity of the working memory model.

However, one problem with this research support is that it lacks ecological validity. For example, it was conducted in a lab and the task the participants had to do was artificial as describing angles on a letter F is not an activity that reflects how you might use your working memory in everyday life. This means the study cannot be applied outside of the laboratory setting, meaning the research support for the model is weakened. This has implications for the overall validity of the model.

On the other hand, there is further research support that was conducted in the real world. For example Shallice and Warrington carried out as case study on a brain damaged patient named KF. It was found that KF forgot auditory information in his STM much more so than visual information after having a motorbike accident. This suggests that his brain damage was restricted to his phonological loop but that his visuo-spatial sketchpad was intact. This implies that there are two separate slave systems in working memory as the model states. Therefore, the validity of the model is increased.

In spite of this, the research can be criticised for its biased sample. For example, Shallice and Warrington only studied one participant who suffered from brain damage. KF’s memory may not be representative of how most people’s memories function, thus the results of the study cannot be generalised. This weakens the overall support for the model, which in turn reduces its validity.

Furthermore, a disadvantage of the model is that the understanding of the central executive is too vague. For example, there is relatively little research into it and it is not clear exactly what its function is, or that it even exists. It is supposed to be the key component, yet it is the part that is known least about. This questions the whole credibility of the model.