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#### PERFORMANCE OF PRIMARY FOUR PUPILS IN LITERACY TEST<sup>1</sup> IN A MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL COUNTRY: A STUDY IN SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS.

## PROF 'WOLE FALAYAJO, PROF. S. O. AYODELE & DR. J.G. ADEWALE

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#### Abstract

Nigeria, been a multicultural and multilingual country has 250 to 400 or more recognized ethnic groups, English language is, therefore, adopted as the official language. It is pertinent to find out how Nigerian children perform in the subject because performance in school subjects is one of the measures of school effectiveness. The study was carried out in 28 schools from each state and 14 from Abuja (FC1) totaling an expected 1,036 schools. From the sampled schools, 30 pupils each were randomly selected. In all, 20,664 primary 4 pupils participated in the study. The learning achievement test (literacy) used in this study as the only instrument was curriculum referenced. The items in literacy test were generated on the basis of a table of specification covering different content areas of specific subjects and three levels of cognitive operations namely; Knowledge, Understanding, and Application based on Bloom's hierarchies of cognitive operation. The following were the findings of this study: the pupils made an overall mean score of 29.41%. This performance is considered very low as is below the benchmark of 50% which is considered as the pass mark at primary school level in Nigeria. Pupils from South West performed best followed by those from North East and pupils from the North East performed worse. The implications of the study are discussed.

#### Word count: 203

Key Words: Performance in Literacy Test, Multicultural Country, Multilingual country, School Effectiveness.

#### Background to the Study

Performance of pupils at primary school is one of the measures of school effectiveness. The performance can be interpreted as low drop out, low repetition rate, high promotion rate and high transition rate among all groups of pupils/students/learners. Other indicators of school effectiveness are high pupil/ students/learners and teachers/instructors' attendance; high pupil/students/learners and teachers/instructors' satisfactions; high public confidence in schools; high standard of assessment methods; quality teaching; availabilities and utilization of learning resources; supervision of school work and child-friendly environment. This study focuses on the first measure of school effectiveness – performance of pupils in primary school life-skills in Nigeria.

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in Africa and the largest in area of the West African states, Nigeria was an early twentieth century colony that became an independent nation in 1960. A country of great diversity because of the many ethnic and linguistic groups that live within its borders (Portals of the world, 2005). Nigeria is an English Speaking country in the Western Africa, with southern limits set by Gulf of Guinea; inland frontiers shared with Cameroon (east), Chad (northeast), Niger (north), and Benin (west). The study of Adewale, Adesoji and Iroegbu (2004) reveals that Nigeria, been a multicultural and multilingual country has 250 to 400 or more recognized ethnic groups, many of these ethnic groups are divided into subgroups of considerable social and political importance. Most important ethno linguistic categories are Hausa and Fulani in north, Yoruba in southwest, and Igbo in southeast, other groups are Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, and Ijaw. For convenience, Nigeria has been divided into six geopolitical zones. These zones, to some extent represents some cultural and lingual divisions. For example, people in the South East known as Igbos speak the same general Igbo language (although, there are some variations (dialects) here and there. Those in the South West are known as Yorubas, they speak the same general Yoruba language. Those in the North East and North West also can speak general Hausa language. Whereas, not all those in the North Central can speak Hausa language, they have their native languages like Tiv, Igala, Nupe, etc. In the South

South, there are many languages like Ijaw, Edo, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Efik, Ibibio, etc.

Number of languages is estimated at 350 to 400, many with dialects. The government is aware of the importance of the diversity of language and culture and has decided to maintain the various languages and cultures. The implication, therefore, is a need for an official language to be used in government, large-scale business, mass media, and education beyond lower primary school (primary 4 to primary 6). The choice of English Language became paramount since that is the language used by the colonial master who colonized the country (Adewale et al, 2004).

One of the reasons government investments in education is that children should acquire some basic competences and skills to promote permanent literacy, self sufficiency and some requisite attitudes necessary to function effectively in the context of the nation's socioeconomic-psychological milieu (Makoju, Falayajo, Ayodele, Akinsola, Obaitan, Falaye and Adewale, 2004). The extent to which schooling is able to promote these knowledge and skills especially in literacy test is reflected in the quality of learning outcome in the subject. Learning achievement in literacy is described as how much pupils at a specified level of schooling have acquired in the knowledge and skills in literacy defined for that level within the curriculum. The first learning achievement exercise was carried out in 1996 but was reported in 1997 by Falayajo, Makoju, Okebukola and Onugha. It was noted that the performance of primary 4 pupils was below 50% in all the three subjects studied - literacy (English language, numeracy (mathematics) and Life Skills (combination of subjects like social studies, hygiene, agriculture, civics, etc).

In simple terminology, the word literacy refers to ability to read and write. The dictionary defines it as 'the quality or state of being literate; knowledge of letters; condition in respect to education, especially, ability to read and write.' Usually, this ability is not limited to any specific language, i.e. it could be the mother tongue or a particular target language. In our present circumstance, we limit its use to ability to operate in the official national language, i.e. English language. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), a child is introduced to English language from the first year in the primary

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school, although he is taught other subjects in his mother tongue until the fourth year when he is now taught all subjects in English language. This is the context in which this test of Literacy is targeted at the Primary IV pupils.

#### **Research** Questions

The study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1. What are the levels of competency attainment of pupils in Primary IV in terms of curricular expectations in literacy?
- 2. Is there any significant difference in the competency attainment of pupils in literacy from the six geo-political zones?
- 3. How difficult are the test item in literacy test?

#### Methodology

The present assessment was conducted as a sample survey covering all thirty-six states and Abuja the Federal Capital Territory and consequently a good proportion of the official 774 Local Government Areas. The target population was the pupils in primary IV. The survey involved the administration of learning achievement test in Literacy.

#### Sample Design

A multi-stage stratified sampling design with probability proportional to the number of schools within the LGA in each State was adopted. The survey design provided a basis for valid generalizations at national level and reasonable estimates at State Level. The study was carried out in 28 schools from each state and 14 from Abuja (FCT) totaling an expected 1,036 schools. At least 20 percent of private schools were sampled in each state. From the sampled schools, 30 pupils each were randomly selected. In all, 20,664 primary 4 pupils participated in the study

#### **Development of Instruments**

The learning achievement test (literacy) items were curriculum referenced. Item development was undertaken on a participatory basis involving teachers from various States, school inspectors, representatives of examination units of various State Ministries of Education, representatives of national examination bodies including the

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West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) and resource persons with expertise in test development and evaluation. Using the curricular requirements for primary 4, test items were generated for English Language (Literacy). The items were generated on the basis of a table of specification covering different content areas of specific subjects and three levels of cognitive operations namely; Knowledge, Understanding, and Application based on Bloom's hierarchies of cognitive operation. The initial draft instruments were subjected to face and content validity by experts in specific subject areas and subsequently to pilot testing in six States selected one each from the six geopolitical zones of the country. Based on the pilot results, test items were reviewed for increased reliability and validity.

Content	Lev	TOTAL			
	Understanding	Knowledge	Application		
Grammar	-	6	- <sup>21</sup>	6	
Phonetics	-	4	1	5	
Structure	3	7	6	16	
Vocabulary	-	5	7	12	
Comprehension	5	-	3	8	
Writing			.3	3	
Total	8	22	17	50	

#### Table 1 Table of Specification for Primary 4 Literacy Instrument

Kuder Richardson (KR) 20 was used to establish the internal consistency and construct validity of the test items. The KR 20 yielded a value of 0.930 which was found to be high to warrant its use for the study.

#### Administration of Instruments

Eight data collectors and a supervisor worked in each State, in pairs and in four groups. Each pair of data collectors undertook instrument administration in 8 schools.

#### Data Processing

The editing of background information on the literacy test answer sheets preceded the data entry. It was found that not all the sampled pupils completed the answer sheet correctly, some were badly done and had to be discarded. The MS-DOS editor was used for entry of responses on the tests and screening of data was done using the access. The data analyses were carried out using SCORBATT and SPSS. SCORBATT was used to determine the item difficulty as well test reliability. The demographic and achievement variables were analysed using the SPSS software.

#### Results and Discussion Research Question 1

What is the level of competency attainment of pupils in Primary IV in terms of curricular expectations in literacy?

The overall mean score of the 20,664 Primary IV pupils who took part in this test was 29.41% with a standard deviation of 22.65, showing that the performance is low compared to 50% as pass mark in primary school setting.

Table 2 below shows the frequency distribution and percentages of the total score range in the Test. This is followed up with the bar graph to drive home the ranges in performance.

## Table 2: Distribution of Total Score Ranges on the Primary IV Literacy Test

Difficulty 1 Cot				
Total Score Range	Frequency	Percentage		
0-9%	2017	11.1		
10 - 19%	3188	17.5		
20 – 29%	4071	22.3		
30 - 39%	2160	11.8		
40 - 49%	1905	10.4		
50 – 59%	1451	8.0		
60 – 69%	1409	7.7		
70 – 79%	1287	7.1		
80 - 89%	636	3.5		
90 - 100%	126	0.7		
Total	20664	100.0		

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Table 2 indicates that, generally, higher proportions of pupils featured in the lower percentages, for instance, 73.1% of the pupils scored lower than 50%. The information is further illustrated with the following bar graph.

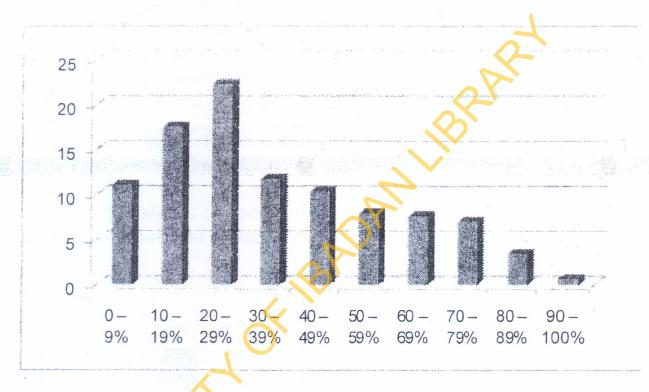


Figure 1: Total score ranges on Primary IV Literacy Test

#### **Research Question 2**

Is there any significant difference in the competency attainment of pupils in literacy from the six geo-political zones?

#### Overall Performance by Geo-Political Zone

When the overall scores are analysed on the basis of geo-political zones, it is found that the performances from each of the zones are rather similar. The lowest score is 27.97% while the highest is 30.85%. All other zones fall within these two extremes as shown in Table 3.

Geo-political zone	Mean	Std. Devn
North east	30.2709b	11.51037
North central	29.5131ab	12.85448
North west	27.9684ª	13.17924
South east	28.0465ª	13.67728
South-south	29.8000ab	15.31031
South west	30.8509b	18.00058
Total	29.4083	14.72390

Table 3: Mean Scores by Subjects in the Various Geo-political Zones.

abc values with different superscripts are significant (p < 0.05) and value with the same superscripts are not significant (P > 0.05).

The table shows the performances in the literacy test. The findings are further illustrated in the following chart

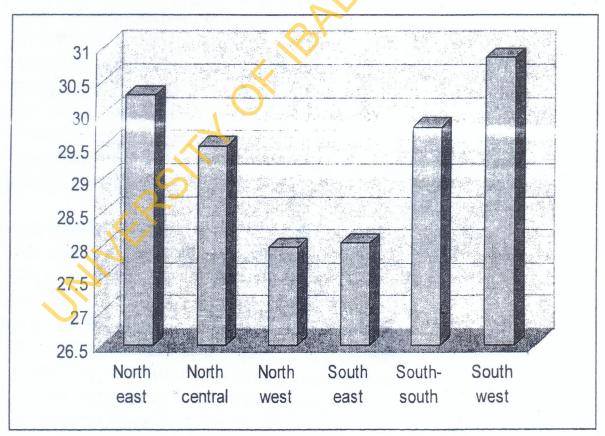


Fig. 2 Mean Scores in the Literacy Test by Zone.

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Although, there is a significant difference in the performance of students who come from various geo-political zones, their scores clustered around 28% and 31%. These scores, numerically, cannot to be said to be different from each other. The implication is that pupils in no geo-political zone could be said to be better than the others from another geo-political zone, therefore, there is a need to find out why pupils found the items difficult as shown by their performances.

#### **Research Question 3**

How difficult are the test item in literacy test?

#### Performances in the Individual Test Items

The purpose of this section is to enable us see how pupils performed in the various test items so as to have an insight into the quality of the various test items and thus consider the extent to which the pupils have a grasp of the various English language concepts they are being taught in school. To some extent, the exercise here enables us have an idea of how well constructed the various test items are. For, where virtually every pupil is able to answer a question correctly, that item may have been poorly constructed as to make it rather cheap; conversely, where virtually all pupils fail an item, that item may have been badly constructed as to make it too difficult. For easy of discussion, we take all the items group by group, i.e. with all the grammar items considered first, followed by those of phonetics, etc.

#### Grammar items.

There are 6 items classified as testing grammar skill. Thus, these form 12% of all the 50 items in the test. However, these grammar items are not of the same genre, as our analysis would show.

Each of the first five items is framed the same way, and each seeks to establish pupils' mastery of the questioning pattern 'Who...', 'What...', 'Can...', etc. The computer analysis on each of these five items suggests that they are very good and well framed. For instance, the first item which is framed thus, '...is the boy's name?' with the options 'What, Who, Why, When', was answered correctly by 68.5% of the pupils while Journal of Applied Edu. & Vocational Research Vol.6, No.1October, 2008

10.8% of the pupils didn't do it at all. The remaining 20.7% chose from the wrong options. Table 4 presents these first five items to show the percentage of pupils who got them right and of those that got them wrong.

o Omitted	or got th	he first 5
% Omit	%	%
	Correct	Wrong
10.8%	68.5%	20.7%
11.6%	58.1%	30.3%
13.7	45.3	41.0
13.8	53.2	33.0
14.4	37.1	48.5
		:
	•	×
	% Omit 10.8% 11.6% 13.7 13.8	Correct           10.8%         68.5%           11.6%         58.1%           13.7         45.3           13.8         53.2

In interpreting the table, we should bear in mind that three options are summed up to account for the last column, i.e. the three incorrect answers for each items make up the '% Wrong', whereas only one option that is correct accounts for the column '% Correct'. From this analysis, we can see that the best item is 1 since all the pupils who chose the three wrong options are still fewer than those who chose the one correct option. Even the item 5 which seems to be the weakest is still a good option because most of the pupils still chose the correct options, whereas the 48.5% others are spread over three wrong distracters. The

next category of items are in phonetics.

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#### **Phonetics** items

This is an aspect that was not tested in the 1996 exercise, but which must be assessed because the new curriculum directs teachers to teach it. Only five items are presented and all amongst the first few items on the test instrument, i.e. in Numbers 7 – 11. The items were designed to leave out phonetics technicalities and yet test the extent to which pupils are able to recognise types of English sounds they hear and use on a daily basis. The following two examples and the analysis on them would illustrate.

Table 5:Proportion of Pupils who omitted or got items 6 and 7correct/wrong

			Contraction of the second se
Item	% Omit	%	% Wrong
		Correct	
Which of these words has a long	15.4	41.3	42.7
sound?			
A. sit; B. sat; C. seat; D. site			
Which word begins with a $/k/$	14.9	30.9	54.2
sound?			
A. cocoa; B. knock; C. champion; D. cite			

In all, although performances are poorer than they are for grammar items, they are not particularly disappointing. Judging from the fact that this is the first time such items are presented at the primary school level, teachers would now be aware of the need to stress the teaching of this genre of language skills.

#### Structure Items

There are a total of 16 structural items in the test. There are basically three groups in this test: test of tag questions, test of auxiliary verbs, test of the use of 'who/whom/whose' to introduce relative clause. We will take an item from each case to illustrate pupils' general mastery of structures in English.

Table 6:	Proportion of Pupils who omitted or got items 13-15	,
	correct/wrong	

Item	%	%	%
	Omit	Correct	Incorrect
13. 'Sir, can the pupils go back to school?'	15.6	37.9	46.5
'No, they'			
A. can; B. won't; C. doesn't; D. can't			
14. That boy is so young; I don't think he	15.3	44.0	40.7
lift the box. A. must; B. can; C. should;			
D. mustn't			
30. Miss Ishaya is the kind lady gives	19.1	32.9	48
us pencils every Monday.			
A. whom; B. when; C. whose; D. who.			

Since sufficiently high percentages of pupils answer the items incorrectly, we can affirm that the items are not good enough and that there isn't enough mastery of structure items among pupils.

#### Vocabulary Items.

There are 12 items specifically addressed to assess pupils' mastery of the vocabulary of English language where a letter is presented with five missing gaps, each of which is to be filled by selecting the most appropriate word from a given list. Unfortunately, because these all come towards the end of the test, quite a good number of pupils did not even get there. However, from the analysis for those who did, we can affirm that performances in each of them is satisfactory.

Table 7:	Proportion of Pupils who omitted or got items 38 and 41
	correct/wrong

Item	%	%	%
그가 한 방법은 것이라는 것은 가격에서 가지 못했다. 그 사람들	Omit	Correct	Incorrect
38. Thank you very for your last letter.	23.4	38.7	37.9
A. well; B. greatly; C. much; D. dearly.	Ŧ		-
41. 41. I shall be if you would send me	27.1	40.1	32.8
money.			
A. ready; B. happy; C. willing; D. careful			

#### **Comprehension Items**

There are eight comprehension items in the test, all based on a comprehension passage. These are among the few items that were directly borrowed from the 1996 test to enable us have a direct comparison with the earlier MLA exercise. However, while in 1996, the comprehension exercise came first in the paper, thus enabling most pupils to do them, this time the comprehension exercise comes towards the tail end, with the result that many people did not get there before the time was up. However, from those who were able to do it, the results are quite revealing. In the analysis for two of the items as presented in Table 7, we cannot include the questions because the passage is fairly long.

#### Discussion

A large number of pupils omit very many items, especially those towards the end of the test. This implies that the pupils are slow and word-for-word readers. For them to do well in literal world, the pupils from primary school should cultivate the art of reading. There are many factors which could impede or assist pupils' achievement in Literacy test, some of them could be linked to socio-economic background of the pupils. It should be noted that majority (80%) of the schools used in this study are public schools, the implication is that most pupils from public schools are from low socio-economic background whose parents might not be able to provide those learning materials that could be used in for learning. For example, newspapers and magazines and other learning materials which research has documented that they aid learning where they are available may not be present in these pupils' home (Adu, 2002; Farombi, 1998; Obemeata, 1991). Their availability seems to have encouraged further reading at home.

Another reason could be attributed to the level of funding in primary schools. Such levels include the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), government grants and donations from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The level of funding in our schools is low, most study indicate that the higher the level of funding the better the performance of students both at primary and secondary school levels and the same is true of tertiary education. This is so because the grants received by schools could be used to purchase those things which are likely to promote learning experiences. Examples of such items are teaching aids, library, library furniture and fittings and textual materials (Farombi, 1998 and Onwuakpa 1998 Adu, 2002). Unfortunately, the trend has been to reduce governments' overall spending both nationally and internationally and in many cases, those reductions have resulted in declines in funding for public schools (Haycock, 2005). Hence, it is possible for schools not to have all that is needed to increase students' learning outcomes. The implication of this trend is that students' achievement will be lowered. If the major concern of a developing nation like Nigeria is to develop technologically, there is the need to put education and students' achievement on a priority list thereby fund it well.

Another variable that is likely to affect pupils' achievement in literacy test is the language spoken at home by the pupils. Findings from research indicates that there is a negative correlation and this implies that as pupils shift from speaking language of the immediate environment to English Language, their achievement level in literacy tend to improve. This implies that school pupils who predominantly used a language other than English at home had lower achievement than their predominantly English-speaking peers. This assertion agrees with the finding of Secada's (1992) who illustrates how language and other factors affect pupils' achievement. He argues that most students have uneven distribution ability in English Language and this disparity

affects the achievement levels of limited English proficiency students, whose achievement levels are compared to other populations with high proficiency in English.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the performances of the over 20,00 pupils who took part in this literacy test, we arrived at the following findings, the pupils made an overall mean score of 29.41%. This performance is considered very low as is below the benchmark of 50% which is considered as the pass mark at primary school level. Pupils from south west performed best followed by those from North East and pupils from the north east performed worse. Although very few of the pupils ventured into the test of writing, which is composed of merely copying out a sentence, those who did scored very highly. So, this constituted the best area of the test for the pupils. This is followed by scores for grammar, structure and vocabulary. Performances were poorest in the area of comprehension. From the findings and some of the comments above, it is pertinent to make the following recommendations that are teachers, parents and pupils – based.

- i. Since the performance of pupils is less to be desired, teachers are encouraged to use different methods of instruction which could be used to promote learning.
- ii. Pupils are also encouraged to be fast both in reading and reacting to questions. They are also encouraged to read supplements which could help them deal with questions that relate to phonetics.
- iii. The parents are encouraged to buy reading materials for their children. These reading materials are likely to improve students' achievement in literacy test.

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## JOURNAL OF APPLIED EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL RESEARCH

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