

# LANGUAGE APTITUDE TEST AS A TOOL FOR DETERMINING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ISEYIN AND ITESIWAJU LGAs, OYO STATE

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## **Abstract**

*Language aptitude test is used to predict the capability of a learner to acquire a language. The paper determined whether or not the concept of language aptitude test had truly performed its role on pupils' performances. The study surveyed 14 primary schools and 10 secondary schools in Iseyin and Itesiwaju local government areas (LGAs) of Oyo state covering results of pupils in common entrance examination in English language for 2013/2014, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 academic sessions and the students' performances in Junior Secondary School (JSS) One examination in English language for the same sessions under review. From the findings, it was revealed that failure rates were on the high side in their junior secondary examinations in English language, the performances were extremely better in the common entrance aptitude test in English language though such excellent performances in their JSS One examination in English language were attributed to too many factors thus rendering the common entrance examination not only unreliable but highly invalid. Based on the findings, it is recommended that there should be an overhauling of the way examinations are being conducted to truly reflect pupils' performances and at the same time achieving the desired result of pre-empting their performances in English language at the secondary school level.*

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## **Introduction**

Prior to the Education Ordinances of 1898, 1906 and 1926, the teaching of English language was not a major subject in the school curriculum but later English language became the medium of instruction in the upper primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. It is also taught in the General studies department of the Nigerian colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. It is no longer news that admission is given to students in any tertiary institution upon passing English language in addition to having good grades in both Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and post UTME test. Gaining admission into secondary schools from primary schools

also depend on English language as a major subject that must be passed by the candidate in the common entrance examination conducted by the ministry of education of all the states.

English language is therefore *primus inter pars* among all the subjects offered in our schools. Before a student can graduate, he must have a good grade in the use of English and is equally a language employed in economic, religious, administrative, political, communication and military domains in Nigeria (Aremu, 2015). Adebija (1989) opines that having the communicative competence in the language gives access to certain social privileges.

A test is the procedure used in

assessing the presence or absence of a given type of learning in a learner or group of learners. A test could be conducted to find out if your students know and understand the facts you taught them and also to discover if the students can use the facts and skills acquired to do some tasks in the subject you teach. A test must be able to compare individuals not only in the context of our country, but also across countries which can only be achieved through the use of cultural equivalent tests which are both reliable and valid.

Rysiewicz (2008), citing Carol (1968), argues that the requirements of test validity and test reliability are of paramount importance for the development of any mental test and to achieve this, Rysiewicz (2008) submits that a test must be able to consistently define the levels of a measured dimension (be reliable), measure what we want to measure and nothing else (objective), interpret its results not depending on who, where and when (objective), display uniform testing conditions (standardized), allow for the interpretations of the results across groups (age norms), and be adapted to a receiving country's specific conditions.

A test is therefore carried out as a feedback mechanism to the instructor and the learner in any given task or field of study be it education, science, politics, languages to mention but a few. Language testing therefore evolved with a view to testing students' knowledge of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and grammatical structures. A teacher can also conduct language test to ascertain how the students can use the knowledge and skills you taught them to do various language exercises.

Carol (1981) sees aptitude test as a set of primary capacities, propensities at an individual's time, available to him prior to

learning and, to a certain degree influencing his potential level of achievement. Rysiewicz (2008), citing Carol (1973), sees language aptitude as a function of time. The claim he is making is that practically anyone is predestined to learn a second language provided the instruction is appropriate; the learner is motivated and able to profit from instruction. Language aptitude thus refers to the potential that a person has for learning languages. This potential is often evaluated using formal aptitude tests which predict the degree of success the candidate will have with a new language. Aptitude tests vary but many include evaluation of ability to manage sounds, grammatical structures, infer rules and memory.

Various stakeholders in English language teaching such as examination bodies, government and teachers have therefore constructed series of language aptitude tests to determine would be performance of students in any language task with a view to preparing them for the task ahead or ascertaining whether they can cope or not. In the Nigerian context, UTME, Post UTME, common entrance examinations are conducted for applicants and English language has always been a core subject in such examinations and if a candidate fails English language, his hope of gaining admission into the intended school is dashed.

Primsleur (1966) conducted a research on what foreign language Aptitude (FLAP) entails and discovers that language aptitude is defined in term of cognitive abilities of sound identification, coding of meaning and inductive rule acquisition but however concludes that knowledge of first language lexis (Verbal intelligence) is needed in foreign language learning ability. Carol (1981) was of the view that human beings are not just tabular rasa in structure of

foreign language aptitude as he claimed that anyone is predestined to learn a second language provided the instruction is appropriate, the learner is motivated and able to profit from instruction. Learners' aptitude is therefore a product of stimulus-response for any goal to be achieved.

Reber (1985), working on the relationship between aptitudes and abilities, concludes that tests of aptitudes are in reality, test of performance (ability) and interest. According to him, the distinction in usage comes from the notion of making prediction about future achievement. The only difference lies in the function they perform: ability performs diagnostic function while aptitude performs prognostic function.

Garcia (2003) carried out a research on language learning in the classroom environment between younger starters and later starters and concluded that later starters consistently outperform younger starters on measures of L2 achievement. Tellier and Roehr-Brackin (2013) on their investigation of language learning aptitude and metalinguistic awareness among children confirmed that language analytic ability of a child is a significant predictor of L2 achievement.

Considering myriads of researches and publications on language aptitude, intelligence motivation and abilities as they affect learners' performance in English language shows that not much work has been done on the effect of language aptitude test as it affects students' performances in English language examinations. This paper therefore seeks to examine the effects of language aptitude tests conducted for primary six school leavers and students' performances in English language examination at the junior secondary schools one.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Reaching the conclusion that the failure rate in English language is high is an understatement as students' poor performances in the language is tantamount to a fall in the standard of education generally. Various efforts have thus been put in place to arrest this ugly trend among which is to conduct an Aptitude Test in English to ascertain pupils' abilities to acquire the language in future. Despite both human and material resources expended by the government on the conduct of this test, not much impact is felt in students' performances in English language at the secondary school level. The researcher therefore aims at ascertaining reasons behind this with a view to correcting the nauseating trend.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study set out to determine whether Language Aptitude Test is truly a vital tool in determining students' performances in English language. The study is equally to identify areas of difficulties in the conduct of this test with a view to improving on it to achieve the desired result.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions were generated for this study and they are:

1. What is the opinion of teachers and students to the conduct of language aptitude test?
2. Does language aptitude test have any effect on students' performance in English language?
3. Can gender influence students' performance in language aptitude test and English language examinations?

### **Scope of the Study**

The population employed for this study consisted of pupils and students in Iseyin and Itesiwaju LGAs of Oyo state in Nigeria. Iseyin LGA has one hundred and thirty seven (137) primary schools and twenty four (24) secondary schools while Itesiwaju LGA has seventy (70) primary schools and eleven (11) secondary schools.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

Descriptive research design was employed for this study. This was considered adequate because it aimed at determining the effect of Language Aptitude Test on students' performances in English language at the secondary school.

#### **Population/Sample and Sampling Techniques**

As this study aims at determining the relationship between pupil's performances in English language in common entrance and their performances in English language examinations in their first year in their chosen secondary schools, twenty four (24) schools were randomly selected from the two sampled LGAs comprising fourteen (14) primary schools and ten (10) secondary schools. Pupils' performances in English language for 2013/2014, 2014/2015 & 2015/2016 sessions were sourced from the records of the local inspectors of education in the two LGAs. Broad sheets of the same set of students were obtained from the vice principals of the schools chosen. Through this, records of their performances in English language were clearly seen, thus making comparison easier.

One thousand one hundred and twenty six (1,126) pupils' common entrance

results in English language and three thousand one hundred and seventy nine (3,179) students' JSS one results in English language from six (06) secondary schools in Iseyin LGA, and six hundred and sixty eight (668) pupils' common entrance results in English language and one thousand seven hundred (1,700) students' JSS one results in English language from (04) secondary schools in Itesiwaju LGA were sourced for the study for the period under review.

#### **Instrumentation**

A 5-item questionnaire each was prepared for both the teachers and the students to determine their views on the conduct of language aptitude test for primary six school leavers. Five (05) students and two (02) teachers were randomly chosen from each of the twenty four (24) selected schools. Statutory records (Broad sheets) containing students' performances in English language in the sampled secondary schools from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 academic sessions were also used.

#### **Validation of the Instrument**

The questionnaire was validated by senior colleagues in the departments of English and General Studies for necessary amendments. The corrections identified were effected before administering it on the selected respondents. A test-retest method was used for the reliability of the instrument yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.72.

#### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed item by item and the statistical tool used is simple percentage.

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**Results**

Table 1

*Teachers' Opinion on the Conduct of Language Aptitude Test (LAT)*

S/N	Statements	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1.	Are you in support of the opinion that Language Aptitude Test should be used to assess students performance?	48	100.00	0	0.00
2.	Your students are usually happy whenever it is period for English studies.	30	62.50	18	37.50
3.	Your students often answer correctly questions you pose to them.	32	66.70	16	33.30
4.	Your students ask relevant questions on English language	45	93.75	3	6.25
5.	Your students always do the assignments given to them and submit them for marking	46	95.83	2	4.16

Table 2

*Students' Opinion on the Conduct of Language Aptitude Test*

S/N	Statements	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1.	Are you in support of conducting language aptitude test to determine your future?	120	100	0	0
2.	You always feel excited whenever it is period for English	95	79.2	25	20.8
3.	You always answer questions from your teachers correctly	100	83.3	20	16.7
4.	Do you ask interesting questions from your English Language teacher(s)?	105	87.5	15	12.5
5.	Do you always do your exercise and assignments given to you by your English Language teacher?.	120	100	0	0

Tables 1 & 2 clearly showed that both the teachers and the students were in support of the conduct of language aptitude test to determine students' performance in English language one hundred and twenty (120) students representing 100% were in support of the conduct of Language Aptitude Test. Nearly all the students and the teacher believe that assignments should be given on English Language and should be submitted on time. From the tables, it could

also be deduced that relevant questions in the language should be asked while the class is going on, to achieve mastery. It could therefore be concluded from Tables 1 & 2 that the position of both the teachers and the students toward the teaching and testing in English Language is positive.

Table 3

*Primary Schools Common Entrance Results in English Language in Iseyin LGA*

Grade	2013/2014	Session		Total	Percentage
		2014/2015	2015/2016		
70 and above	23	19	14	56	4.97
60-69	39	27	31	97	8.61
50-59	229	242	187	658	58.44
40-49	72	75	127	274	24.33
30-39	13	9	19	41	3.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>1126</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 3, the number of pupils that passed stood at 1,085 representing 96.35% while only 41 pupils representing 3.64% failed the common entrance

examination (English language) and surprisingly majority of the pupils scored above 50% in the examination.

Table 4

*Results of JSS One Students in English Language in Iseyin LGA*

Grade	2013/2014	Session		Total	Percentage
		2014/2015	2015/2016		
70 and above	21	14	16	51	1.60
60-69	35	23	23	81	2.55
50-59	74	112	75	261	8.21
40-49	281	110	116	507	15.95
30-39	647	801	831	2,279	71.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,058</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>1,061</b>	<b>3,179</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 showed the students' performance in English language examination at the JSS one. This is contrary to the expectation of the researcher. Over

2,279 students representing 71.69% failed the examination and majority of the candidates that passed scored between 40-49 marks.

Table 5

*Common Entrance Results in English Language in Itesiwaju LGA*

Grade	2013/2014	Session		Total	Percentage
		2014/2015	2015/2016		
<b>70 and above</b>	15	16	10	41	6.14
<b>60-69</b>	23	32	25	80	11.98
<b>50-59</b>	148	127	162	437	65.42
<b>40-49</b>	26	36	22	84	12.57
<b>30-39</b>	07	13	06	26	4.34
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>668</b>	<b>100</b>

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In Table 5, an outstanding performance was displayed in their common entrance (English language) results with many candidates scoring 50 and above while 26 pupils representing 4.34% failed.

Table 6

*Result of JSS One Students in English Language in Itesiwaju LGA*

Grade	Session			Total	Percentage
	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016		
<b>70 and above</b>	05	10	07	22	1.29
<b>60-69</b>	10	22	09	41	2.41
<b>50-59</b>	27	64	61	152	8.94
<b>40-49</b>	67	85	98	250	14.71
<b>30-39</b>	441	374	420	1,235	72.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>100</b>

In Table 6, the ugly trend still repeated itself as 1,235 representing 72.65% failed the examination while only 465 representing 27.35% passed the examination and to worsen the matter, majority of the candidates that passed had scores between 40 – 46 marks.

Table 7

*Common Entrance Results in English Language in Iseyin LGA from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 Academic Sessions*

Score	70 and above	60-69	50-59	40-49	30-39	Total
<b>Male</b>	24	33	180	112	28	<b>377</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	2.1	2.9	16	9.9	2.5	<b>33.5</b>
<b>Female</b>	32	64	478	162	13	<b>749</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	2.8	5.7	42.5	14.4	1.2	<b>66.5</b>

From Table 7, it could be seen that 736 female pupils representing 65.4% scored above 40 marks while 349 male pupils representing 30.97% scored above 40 marks in the common entrance examination for the period under review.

Table 8

*Result of JSS One students in English Language in Iseyin LGA from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 Academic Sessions*

Score	70 and above	60-69	50-59	40-49	30-39	Total
<b>Male</b>	23	30	118	244	1,883	<b>2,298</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	0.7	0.9	3.7	7.7	59.2	<b>72.3</b>
<b>Female</b>	28	51	143	263	396	<b>881</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	0.9	1.6	4.5	8.3	12.5	<b>27.7</b>

Table 8 showed that 415 male students representing 13% and 485 female students representing 15.3% passed the examination in English language, scoring above 40 marks.

Table 9

*Common Entrance Results in English Language in Itesiwaju LGA from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 Academic Sessions*

Score	70 and above	60-69	50-59	40-49	30-39	Total
Male	20	37	166	41	14	278
Percentage	3.0	5.5	24.9	6.1	2.1	41.6
Female	21	43	271	43	12	390
Percentage	3.1	6.4	40.6	6.4	1.8	58.4

From Table 9, 264 male pupils representing 39.5% passed while 378 female pupils representing 56.5% passed

the common entrance examination scoring above 40 marks.

Table 10

*Result of JSS One students in English Language in Itesiwaju LGA from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 Academic Sessions*

Score	70 and above	60-69	50-59	40-49	30-39	TOTAL
Male	07	16	62	115	1112	1312
Percentage	0.4	0.9	3.6	6.8	65.4	77.2
Female	15	25	90	135	123	388
Percentage	0.9	1.5	5.3	7.9	7.2	22.8

Table 10 showed that 265 female students representing 15% passed while 200 students representing 11.7% passed scoring above 40 marks in the JSS one English language examination.

responses of students in the class and take home assignment given to the students. This clearly confirms that students were in support of the conduct of language aptitude test.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The finding of this study as revealed in Tables 1 & 2 indicated that both the teachers and students saw the need for the conduct of language aptitude test for primary school leavers especially in English language. Students are always happy during English language lesson and relevant questions were always asked from their teachers on knotty areas in the language. The teachers were equally satisfied with

On whether language aptitude test has any effect on students' performances in English language examinations, the records from the Local Inspectors of Education covering a three-year period (2013-2015), only 41 representing 3.46% failed the common entrance paper in English language while 1,085 representing 96.75% passed the examination and majority of the pupils scored above 50% but going through the broad sheets provided by the vice principal academics of the sampled schools, the story



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was different as 2,279 students representing 71,69% failed the English language examinations and worst still, majority of the students that passed as shown in tables 4 & 6 scored between 40 – 49 marks. The performances were bad and a clear deviation from their previous performances in their Common Entrance Examination.

On whether gender influences pupils'/students' performances in both common entrance examination and JSS one examination, sex was not a determinant in their performances though there were more female students performing better and the reason for this is that there were more female pupils/learners in the sampled schools and as a result, determines the variations in their performances as shown in Tables 7 & 9.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study reveals that the conduct of language aptitude test in English language for primary six pupils is a welcome

development as it prepares them for the task ahead and that nearly all the pupils passed this examination though attributed to too many factors such as: teachers' involvement in the examination, government policies and pupils' activities in the examination halls, but when they found themselves in secondary schools with little or no tolerance for ugly deals in the examination, students find it difficult to excel except the serious ones thus making mess of the common entrance examination conducted for them.

It is therefore recommended that if the examination will truly reflect pupils' performances and at the same time achieving the desired result of preempting their performances in English Language and other subjects at the secondary schools, an overhauling of the way the examination is being conducted, marked and pupils' placement done is required.

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