

schools has been increasingly recognised by policy makers in England. There has been valuable work by DfE on managing mobility in schools with high levels of pupils turn over (DfE 2003). The overall policy strategy is to recognise high mobility as a problem for a few schools in exceptionally challenging circumstances. Thus, pupil mobility can be seen to have a direct relevance to equality, or inequality, of opportunity. The government believe that schools which have both poverty and high mobility have an immensely difficult task trying to develop the potential of their pupils.

Table 4: African Pupil Attainment by mobility rate and Length of Time Spent in School

Mobility by Length of Time Spent in School	Black African		Local Authority- All	
	Cohort number	GCSE 2019 % Results	Cohort number	GCSE 2019 % Results
Year 7 (Non-mobile)	473	65%	1803	60%
Year 8	38	66%	131	53%
Year 9	37	54%	121	52%
Year 10	32	50%	123	44%
Year 11	3	33%	11	36%
Year 8 to 11 (Mobile)	110	56%	386	49%
Gap: Mobile-nonmobile		9%		11%

However, despite policy relevance, yet there has been little research into the relationship between mobility factors and achievement in English schools. Some researchers suggest that increased mobility of pupils in schools leads to decreased achievement. Pupils who have spent many terms in the same school tend to achieve better results than those who must change schools frequently (e.g., Dobson and Heathorne, 1999). This study also shows a strong association between pupil mobility and performance in national tests and examination results. Demie (2002) also analysed data collected in England as part of a study designed to assess the effects of mobility on achievement. The main findings of that study revealed that, on average, 44% of GCSE non-mobile pupils achieved the expected level compared to 21% of the mobile group. The study also shows that there was a steady decline in average performance, the less time the pupils spent in the primary and secondary schools where they were tested. Pupils who spent all of GCSE in the same school, achieved better than year 8 arrivals, who in turn achieved better than year 9 arrivals, and that pupils who arrived in the year of the GCSE examinations did the least well. Overall, the findings show that those pupils who had been in the school for the whole GCSE period did markedly better than others who joined the school in later years. The findings in the previous study are compelling and confirm that pupil mobility is a major issue and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The overwhelming message from previous research suggest that, by and large, pupil mobility can have an adverse effect on educational attainment and pupil mobility is a common experience in schools (Dobson and Heathorne, 1999; Demie 2002). Despite this however, little research has been carried to see its effect by ethnic background.

Table 4 shows comparative performance of mobile and non-mobile of Black African pupils within the local authority. For purpose of this research, the term ‘mobile pupils’ refers to pupils who first joined the English school system in Year 8 or later. There is a striking difference in performance between mobile and non-mobile pupils: 56% of Black African pupils who were mobile reached the expected standard at GCSE compared to 65% of non-mobile pupils. Non-mobile pupils were more likely than their mobile peers of the same ethnicity to gain the expected level. Tables 4 also illustrate this point with, on average, Black African pupils who spent all KS4 in the same school achieving better than the Year 9, 10 and 11 arrivals. Without doubt, mobility influences attainment, and although Black African pupils seem slightly less affected than pupils overall in the LA, it does still influence their performance.

3 Discussion and policy implications

There is a wealth of existing research into factors affecting performance of different ethnic groups in schools in England. Despite this, researching the achievement of different ethnic groups in English schools has been complicated by the problem of categorisation of groups which are too broadly defined nationally as “Black African” and “White Other” (Aspinall 2002, Demie 2018, 2019). A literature review suggests that Black African pupils in the national school census are a very varied group made up of pupils from many different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, who are likely to show a wide variation in achievement (Mitton 2011; Demie 2015, 2018; Von Ahn 2011). Researchers are now recognising the weakness of using Black African as a group for performance monitoring and for supporting pupils in the classroom, without considering these factors. Building on previous research which explored the links between ethnic background and academic achievement, this study focuses on the potential of language data to examine the attainment of Black African pupils, and the factors that help in raising achievement in English schools.

The research draws on detailed LA data for 2,189 pupils who sat GCSE in 2019 in an English LA to answer these questions. The methodological approach employed consisted of attainment data analysis by factors such as ethnic background, languages spoken at home, disadvantage, pupil mobility and stages of English proficiency to illustrate differences in attainment and to explore the factors influencing performance in schools. The main findings of the empirical evidence show that the Black African ethnic category is one of the most linguistically diverse groups with the highest and the lowest achieving groups. In 2019, Black African pupils speaking Ga, Swahili and Luganda had the highest rates of attainment, well above the national average, while Krio and Somali speakers had lower rates of attainment, below that nationally. Various possible explanations were considered for the differences in performance between different Black African language groups including factors such as stages of English proficiency, disadvantage, and pupil mobility. The further analysis of the data by stage of English proficiency and attainment shows that GCSE results increased as the stage of proficiency increased. EAL pupils who were fully fluent in English were also much more likely to get higher results when compared with English-only speakers. In addition, the data shows that no one in stage A (New To English) and Stage B (Early acquisition) achieved the expected standards of achievement compared to 38% at Stage C (Developing competency), 59% at stage D (competent), 68% at Stage E (fluent) and 67% (English only).

Another factor affecting the achievement of Black African is poverty. However, the gap much smaller when compared to other ethnic groups suggesting that for Black African pupils’ other factors mitigate the effect of socio-economic disadvantage. The data shows there is a gap of 33 percentage points for White British pupils compared to 8 percentage point gap for Chinese, a 15 point gap for Black Caribbean, and 11 point gap for Mixed White and Black African, whilst the gap for White other and Black African is nine percentage points.

Pupil mobility also affects Black African pupils’ performance. The main message from the mobility data suggest there is a striking difference in performance between mobile and non-mobile pupils with 56% of Black African pupils who were mobile reaching the expected standard at GCSE compared to 65% of non-mobile pupils. Furthermore, Black African pupils who spent all KS4 in the same school achieving better than the Year 9, 10 and 11 arrivals.

The overall conclusion from this study is that Black African pupils were more likely to gain good grades above their peers at GCSE but within this group there were wide variations. The findings of this study also have implications for data collection and further research. Our study explores how the available language data may be used for analyses to examine the attainment of Black African children. The data shows that Black African pupils are one of the fastest growing groups, but that

those speaking certain languages are still underachieving in English schools. This research also shows how attainment data by language spoken at home could be useful in addressing the achievement of Black African pupils. Despite this, the study is not exhaustive and has implications for the collection and use of data at national and international level. There is a debate to be had whether the current classification and ethnicity and language data collected by the Department of Education's annual school census is useful for research on education. For example, Aspinall (2002) argued that *"the current grouping of African descent populations as Black, Black African hide the huge heterogeneity within these groups which weakness the value of ethnic categorisation as means of providing culturally appropriate education."* Demie (2015) also shows that ethnic groupings obscure realities on diversity and the broad ethnic groupings such as "Black African" or "White other" can hide significant variation in educational performance. We would argue that the worryingly low achievement of some Black African pupils has been masked by failure of government statistics to distinguish *'Black African ethnic group'* that is used in national data collection by languages spoken at home. Our research findings shows that collapsing into *'Black African'* ethnic categories makes comparison problematic as this group had the greatest linguistic diversity with a range of other linguistic groups such as Lingala, Igbo, Yoruba, Krio, Somali, Twi-Fante, Luganda, Tigrinya, Amharic and English speaking Black African speakers, amongst others. It also supports previous findings that suggest language spoken at home is useful in looking into the attainment of Black African pupils. It further adds additional evidence that language data is useful to improve our understanding of the performance of Black African pupils in schools.

In light of our research findings, the government should recognise the importance of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in multicultural schools and value the contribution of the Black African community to British society. The recommendation from this study is that, based on the lessons from the case study LA, the government should consider collecting language spoken at home and English proficiency data to monitor performance and to tackle the differential attainment of Black African pupils and other groups that are underachieving at school. We also recommend that the Government should reconsider the consistency and robustness of the data it collects as part of national school census and should ensure that key data can be disaggregated to allow factors such as gender, age, region, socioeconomic status, levels of English proficiency to be taken into account alongside ethnicity and language spoken at home.

There are also implications for further research. Our research illustrates the diverse nature of current ethnic group categories and calls for a rethink of the categories that we use to understand educational achievement in British schools. As a result of the lack of detailed ethnically based data, there are limitations in past research into different ethnic groups (Gill and Demie 2011). The absence of detailed national data which identifies patterns of achievement of ethnic minority children of African, Asian, and European heritage in English schools, places serious constraints on effective targeting policies and developments at national and local level. As Von Ahn et al (2011) and Demie (2015) have argued, this study also suggests that language spoken provides a better means to understand the relationship between ethnicity and educational achievement. The intention of this study is to look at the possibility of extending the research to other language groups in England schools. There is, therefore, a clear requirement for further research into language groups whose needs are obscured in the White Other ethnic category, speaking languages such as Polish, Albanian, German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, Turkish, Greek, Lithuanian etc. Similarly obscured are the Indian ethnic group who mainly tend to speak Gujarati, Punjabi and Hindi; the Pakistani ethnic group who tend to speak Urdu, Punjabi and the Black African ethnic group which masks the performance of pupils who tend to speak many different languages including English, Yoruba, Somali, Twi-Fante, French, Igbo, Krio, Tigrinya, Lingala, Arabic, Ga, Swahili, Luganda, Amharic, Portuguese, Shona, Fang, Manding, Runyakata, Temne and Zulu etc. to gain a fuller picture of their educational achievements. We also suggest a further longitudinal data analysis, using complex

statistical techniques, to provide additional information that explain the factors affecting the attainment of Black African pupils in England's schools.

Despite the weakness stated above and the need for further research, our study provides empirical statistical evidence on the attainment of Black Africans students living in England that has never been published before. It also helps to understand and assess differences between ethnic and language groups in educational attainment and to identify those areas where research is needed to develop effective strategies to reduce disparities between ethnic and language groups in schools in England and elsewhere.

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