

The Educational Achievement of Black African Children in England

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Research report

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The Educational Achievement of Black African Children in England

Abstract

Purpose

This research aims to explore Black African pupils' attainment at the end of secondary school in England. Two research questions guided this study: What does the attainment data tell us by ethnic background? What does the attainment data tell us by language diversity and EAL English proficiency?

Methodology

The research draws on detailed LA data for 2,189 pupils who sat General Certificate of School Education (GCSE) exams in an inner London Local Authority (LA). The methodological approach employed consisted of data analysis. Firstly, attainment was matched to pupil information by background factors and analysed by ethnic background, languages spoken at home and stages of English proficiency to illustrate differences in attainment.

Findings

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. 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. The study also identified some of the main reasons for performance differences between different groups including factors such as stage of English proficiency.

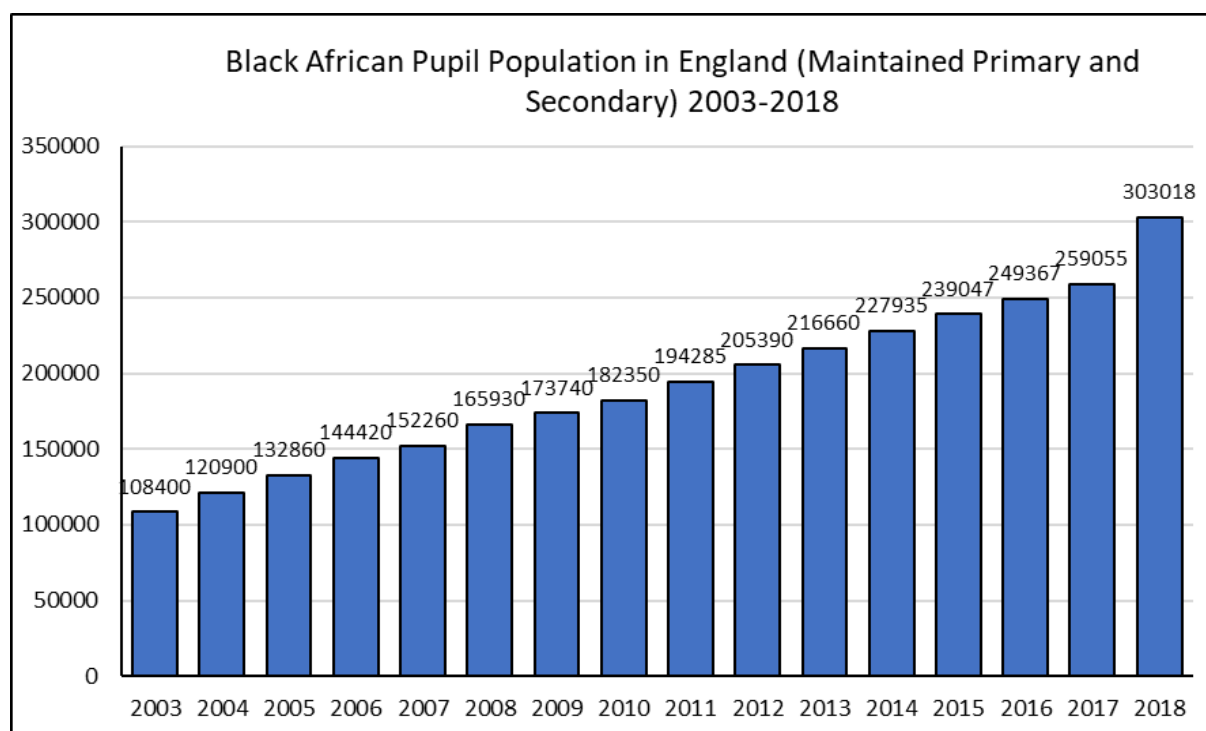
Conclusions

The overall conclusion of the study confirms that Black African pupils were more likely to gain good grades above their peers at GCSE but within this group there were wide variations. It also shows the potential of the use of language diversity data to examine the attainment of Black African pupils. The study argues that the government should recognise the importance of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in multicultural schools. Based on the lessons from the case study LA, the government should consider collecting English proficiency data, in addition to language spoken at home to monitor performance and to tackle underachievement in schools. Policy and research implications are discussed in the final section.

1 Introduction

This article is a contribution to the debate about the educational inequality of ethnic minorities in UK and elsewhere through a case study of Black African pupils attainment in an inner London local Authority (LA) in England. Black African children have attended English schools for decades and yet relatively few studies have examined their attainment. This issue is of increasing importance for the government to develop its education policy and to provide targeted support for a growing Black African population in English schools. Over a decade only about 1.6% of the school population was Black African but recent statistics shows that it is now 3.8% of the school population (DfE 2019). Figure 1 shows that there are currently 303,018 Black African pupils in England.

Figure 1: Growth of Black African Children in English Schools

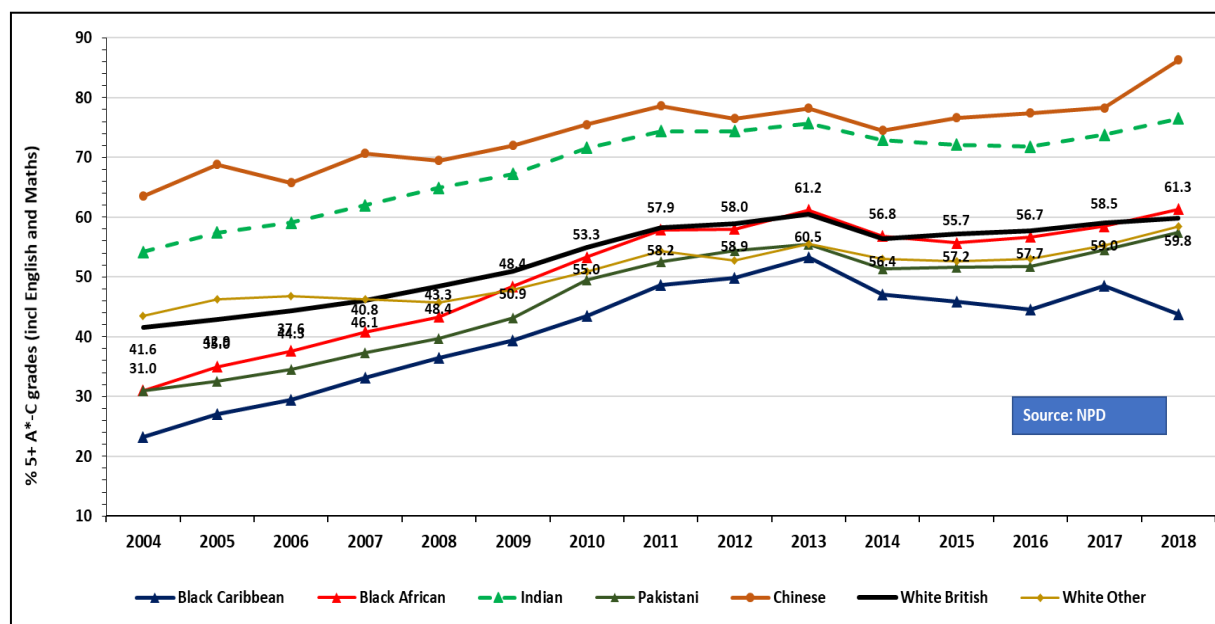


Source: DfE (2019)

Researchers have recognised the growth of the ethnic minority population in the last three decades and they have devoted considerable attention to the issue of underachievement of Black pupils in British schools. Several studies have found that ethnic background factors affect educational outcomes and penalise schools with a high number of pupils from ethnic minorities (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Ofsted, 2002a, b; Tomlinson, 2003; Gillborn, 2008). In addition to the studies reviewed above, other research also suggests that (Strand 2008, 2010 and 2012; Demie and Mclean 2017) considerable under-achievement of Black Caribbean and Other Black pupils, on average, compared with White and Asian children. In addition, the Ofsted report concludes that *“if ethnic diversity is ignored, if differences in educational achievement and experience are not examined, then considerable injustices will be sanctioned and enormous potential wasted”* (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996). This further supported by recent studies by Dustmann et al (2010) that also argued that at the start of school, pupils from most ethnic groups substantially lag behind White British pupils and the gaps decline for all groups through compulsory schooling. However, Strand (2008,2010) studies argued that pupils from most minority ethnic groups made good progress during secondary school and showed greater resilience to deprivation relative to their deprived White British peers. His studies also confirm that Black Caribbean and Black African pupils from more

advantaged homes underachieved in relation to their White British peers. The results suggest in-school factors may be associated with the low attainment and poor progress of Black Caribbean pupils.

Figure 2: GCSE performance trends by ethnic groups in England, 2004-2018 (% 5+ A*-C including English and Maths)



Source: DfE (2019) NPD

Recent empirical evidence at the national level also shows that Black heritage pupils lag far behind the average achievement of many of their peers and that the gap at the end of primary and secondary education is growing. The DfE NPD data (2018) suggests that the gap in performance is widening and many Black Caribbean children in England's schools are not sharing the higher educational standards achieved over the last decade. In 2018 it was identified that amongst those ending their compulsory education in UK, Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils were least successful academically with only 44% of Black Caribbean and 50% of Pakistani pupils achieving 9-4 grade GCSEs in English and Maths (see Figure 2). In contrast, around 77% of Chinese, 86% of Indian, 61% Black African and 60% of White British pupils achieved above the national average. Bangladeshi, Indian, and Chinese pupils also achieved better than African heritage pupils.

A few recent studies have attempted to better understand the many factors associated with achievement and the barriers to learning for ethnic minorities pupils. A number of researchers have argued that ethnic differences in attainment can only properly understood in relation to race and racial discrimination issues and socio-economic factors. Stevens et al (2017) has made a critical review of literature in this area with a sociological perspective on how racial and ethnic inequalities have been studied. Their review is detailed and covered research into the global landscape on race and education, migration patterns of BME groups to UK, research traditions that focus on race, ethnicity, and educational inequality in England. The review also looked in detail with particular focus on racism and racial discrimination in school, the weaknesses, and strengths of research into school effectiveness and school inclusion outcomes. The evidence from the review exposes the impact of race inequality, and gives suggestions on how to further research into the area of ethnicity and educational inequality in England. Based on the review of the literature, they also concluded that:

'The most dominant research traditions explains existing difference in education put come by pointing the process of racism and discrimination in schools, which are either explained by racist process or attitude of teachers and/or the way the education system is organised. As such it favours, usually implicitly, the interest of White, middle class citizens at the exclusion of BME people. (Stevens et al 2017: 464)

Other UK and international evidence also suggests that ethnic minority pupils face at school several problems including poverty across generations, lack of parental engagement and negative attitudes of education. There is now a general consensus that poverty and home factors impact the academic achievement of students and contribute to the achievement gap. What is also clear from previous studies are the attainment difference due to socio-economic factors are much larger and inequality in education outcomes has grown for White British, Black Caribbean, and Pakistani pupils on free school meals (Demie and Mclean 2017).

Previous research has also demonstrated a link between level of fluency in English and underachievement (Demie 2018, Strand and Demie 2006; Strand and Hessel 2018). Children who have English as a second language and are non- fluent in English have restricted access to the National Curriculum and are severely disadvantaged. The research findings from inner London show that children who are not fluent in English tend to do less well in KS1, KS2 and GCSE than those pupils fully fluent in English (Strand and Hessel 2018; Demie 2018). A recent study also shows that it takes about 5 to 7 years on average to acquire academic English proficiency for English as an additional language pupil (Demie 2013).

Other researchers also noted factors such as stereotyping; teachers' low expectations; institutional racism, exclusions and headteachers poor leadership on equality issues as one of the factors that perpetuate low attainment and disengagement from learning by ethnic minority pupils (Demie and Mclean 2017). Also, the lack of knowledge and awareness of teachers and decision makers about the culturally diverse nature of the ethnic minorities communities served by the school system in England is one of the major reasons for underachievement of Black pupils in schools (Demie and Mclean 2017).

A recent study into 'what works' research also suggested that Black African pupils were more likely to gain good grades above their peers at GCSE (Demie and Mclean 2007). The study also identified several good practices that contributed to their success, including strong parental support and links with African communities, effective support for EAL pupils and use of an inclusive curriculum that met the needs of African pupils. What is particularly special about the findings of this study is that Black African parents and pupils place an extremely high value on education and teachers in the schools are equipped to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs and interests of children.

There has been much research into factors affecting performance of different ethnic groups in schools in England (Demie 2015; Cassen and Kingdom, 2007; Dustmann et al 2010). 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." A literature review suggests that Black African, which is collected as part of school census for the National Pupil Database (NPD), is 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, Aspinall 2002). However, there have been relatively few studies that have examined Black African attainment by factors such as language diversity and stages of English fluency (Demie 2015, 2018). Previous studies have argued that low achievement of several ethnic minority groups in England has been masked by Government statistics which do not

consider language spoken at home and English fluency (Demie 2015, Demie and Mclean 2007, Demie 2019). In particular, the Black African and White Other ethnic categories gloss over enormous cultural, geographical, and linguistic diversity. As such, it is useful to be cautious when using the national School Census ethnic categories. Ethnicity is clearly an important category which is connected to language, though obviously does not map straightforwardly onto it. As Von Ahn et al notes '*while many languages "attach" to ethnic groups ... knowing a person's language does not tell us about their country of origin or ethnic heritage*' (2011, p. 6).

There is now recognition of the weakness of using Black African as an ethnic group for performance monitoring and for supporting pupils in the classroom, without considering these factors. We would argue that home language and level of English fluency of Black African pupils are important aspects of pupil achievement and a powerful predictor of differential attainment.

Research aims and questions

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 helps in raising achievement in English schools. Two research questions guided this study:

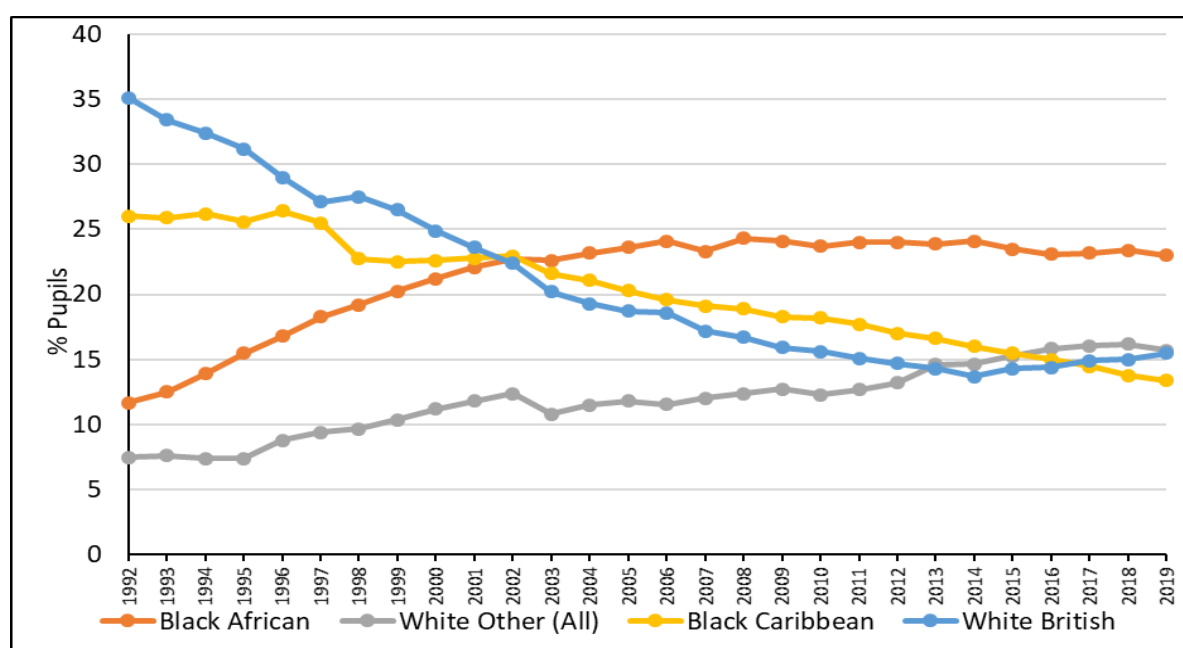
- What does the attainment data tell us by ethnic background?
- What does the attainment data tell us by language diversity and EAL English proficiency?

The data

This research is a Local Authority case study. The research draws on detailed data for 2,189 pupils who took GCSEs in 2019 in an inner London local authority. Data is collected annually in January as part of school census on ethnic background, language spoken at home, and free school meals. This is matched at pupil level to their GCSE results collected by DfE (2019). In addition, language fluency of all the pupils who took GCSE was collected by the LA at the time of the census. In most cases the language and English fluency data was completed and assessed by classroom teachers from the information supplied by parents. The case study LA schools have a long history of collecting English proficiency data since 1990 and the assessment is moderated by the LA.

The main findings of the data show the LA serves a diverse community. The largest ethnic groups were Black African (24.0%), followed by White Other (15.7%), White British (15.5%) and Black Caribbean (13.4%) and mixed-race pupils with a few smaller ethnic minority groups. The data also illustrate the overall proportion of Black African pupils attending the LA schools has increased since 1992 from 11% to 24% in 2019. The ethnic composition of the LA school population has changed considerably over the years (see Figure 3). In 1992, White British was the largest ethnic group with 35% of the pupil population. This dropped markedly and now makes up 15.5% of the cohort. Black African remains the largest pupil ethnic group in LA schools and levels have remained consistent over the last ten years with the numbers of Black African pupils rising in line with the growth of the pupil population (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Changes in School Population in LA by Main Ethnic Group, 1992-2019



Source: Demie and Hau (2019)

The data analysis was carried out in two stages. Firstly, attainment was matched to pupil information and analysed by ethnic background, languages spoken at home to illustrate differences in attainment. Secondly, attainment data was further analysed by social background factors and stages of English proficiency to explore the main factors influencing performance in schools.

Terminology

The term ‘Black African’ is used in the paper to identify pupils with Black African heritage. Previous studies (see Demie and Mclean 2007) shows that the great majority of these pupils in the LA schools have Nigerian or Ghanaian family backgrounds. It also includes a smaller number of pupils whose families originate in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, and Tanzania. However, many of the cultural attitudes, especially towards education, are shared by families from across Africa. It was also noted that in terms of ethnic background all these groups considered themselves as African rather than their country of origin. This view was clearly summed up by one parent during the interviews:

‘In terms of our identity in Britain, we all see ourselves as African rather ... We are Africans it doesn’t matter which country ... I identify myself as African.
(Parent, Demie and Mclean 2007).

Performance measure

For the purposes of this article, GCSE was considered to measure attainment. GCSE is the major examination undertaken by pupils aged 16 at the end of their compulsory schooling, comprising a series of exams in the individual subjects the pupils have been studying. Up until 2017, all subjects were graded A*-G with A* being highest. In 2017, English and mathematics qualifications were given a numeric grade with 9 being the highest, and in subsequent years all subjects were moved to the numeric system. Two key indicators were used in this report – the historic measure of 5+A*-C including English and Maths to look at trends over time (and with grade 9-4 being broadly equivalent to A*-C) and separate analysis of the data by the current measure of pupils gaining both English and Maths at grades 9-4.

2 Attainment of Black African Heritage Pupils in Schools

Ethnic background and attainment

The LA has collected data which has provided an interesting example in research evidence. Recent data collected from schools also allowed us to analyse GCSE results by ethnic background.

Figure 4 shows GCSE results for each main ethnic group which confirm that there are substantial differences in performance. Of the largest ethnic groups sitting GCSE, Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Black African pupils performed the best, surpassing national averages for pupils achieving 9-4 grades in English and Maths in England. In contrast, Black Caribbean and mixed white and Black Caribbean achieved below the national average, by a clear margin. Nationally, 60% of pupils got grade 9-4 in English and maths, but it was 65% for Black African pupils, and 48% for Black Caribbean pupils.

Figure 4: GCSE performance of Black African Pupils (% 9-4 English and Maths 2019)

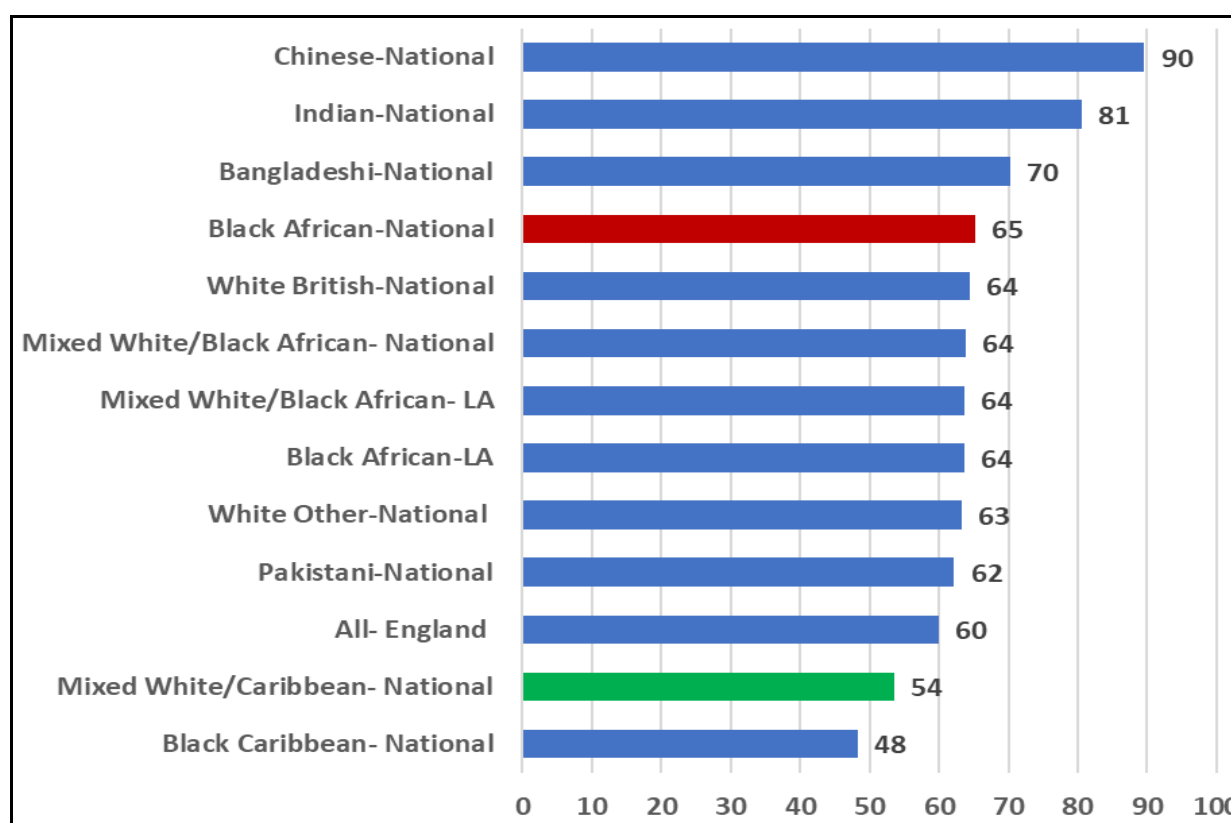
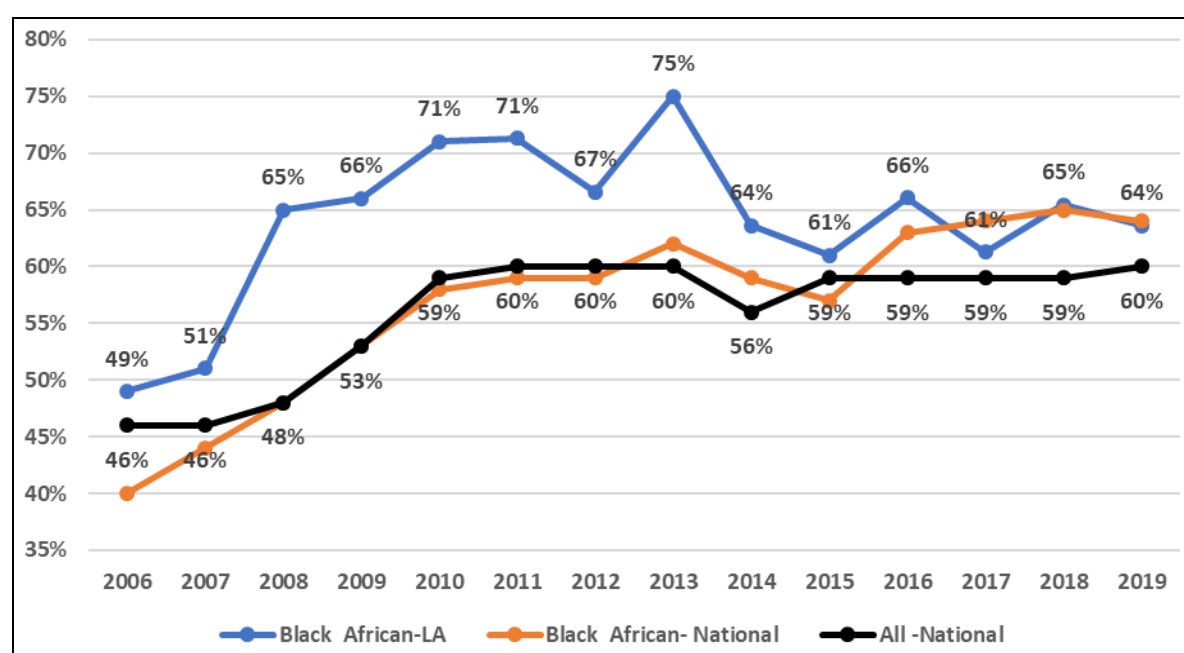


Figure 5 shows that the proportion of Black African pupils in the LA attaining at least 5+A*-C including English and maths, rose from 49% in 2006 to 75% in 2013. However, as a result of change of curriculum and assessment measures, this fell to 64% in 2014, and is still at this level in 2019. Nevertheless, these results have always been better each year than the national average. It is noteworthy that Black African pupils in the LA have consistently outperformed both their peers and all pupils nationally over the last 14 years. It also demonstrates that it would be beneficial to explore further the reasons for Black African pupils' high achievement to support policy and practice.

Figure 5: GCSE performance of Black African pupils (5+ A*-C including English and Maths)



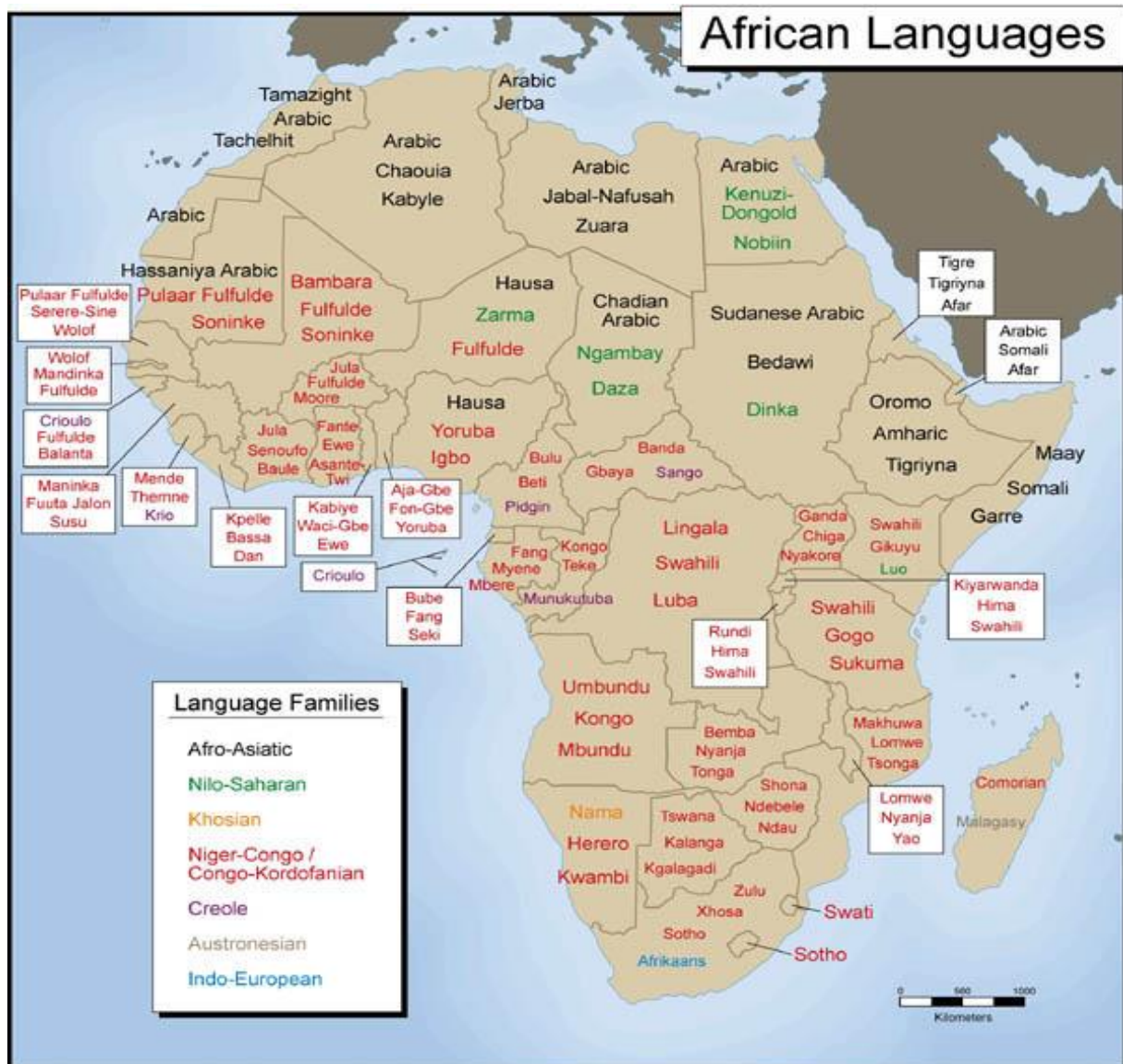
Source: DfE (2019) NPD

Language diversity and attainment

We would argue that the ethnic categories used above are often imprecise in content. For example, the Black African ethnic categories gloss over enormous linguistic diversity and difference. Of the 411 Black African pupils who took GCSE in 2019, 21% spoke English at home, 22% Yoruba, 13% Somali, 9% Twi-Fante, 5% French, 4% Igbo, 4% Krio, 3% Tigrinya, 3% Lingala, 2% Arabic, 2% Ga, 2% Swahili, 1% Luganda, 1% Amharic, 1% Portuguese and 2% spoke other languages such as Shona, German, Fang, Manding, Runyakata, Temne and Zulu. Yoruba, Igbo and Twi-Fante are spoken predominantly in West African countries including Nigeria and Ghana, whereas Lingala originates from Central Africa. Amharic, Tigrinya, and Somali are spoken in East Africa, mainly Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. This constrains the categorisation of the official data available at national level.

The above analysis on performance by ethnic group is valuable in improving our knowledge related to ethnic background and achievement. However, even in the few studies where ethnic differences and educational achievement are considered, the importance of language diversity in achievement between ethnic groups is rarely reported. The empirical evidence for other research (Demie and Hau 2019) shows that the Black African category is one of the most linguistically diverse in LA schools with 21% speaking English as their language at home, followed by Somali (17%), Yoruba (15%), Twi-Fante (10%), French (9%), Tigrinya (4%), Arabic, Igbo, Lingala, Amharic each 3%, Luganda, Krio, Ga, Swahili each 1%. Other languages spoken include Shona, Portuguese, German, Fang, Manding, Runyakata, Temne, Zulu and Oromo. Similarly, the White Other ethnic category is also highly linguistically diverse with Polish the most commonly spoken (45%), Spanish (21%), English (18%), French, Turkish and Albanian each 3%. In addition, several pupils speak languages such as Lithuanian, Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Serb-Croatian, Bosnian, Slovak, Norwegian, Maltese, Latvian, Kurdish, Hungarian, Swedish and Danish.

Figure 6: Map of African Languages



Source: www.isp.msu.edu/afriLang/AfrLangMap.htm. Accessed on 13 December 2019 with permission.

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However, it is possible now from locally collected data to unpick ethnic background by using language data. In terms of educational attainment, there are significant differences within ethnic categories, when the data is disaggregated by language spoken. For example, our data analysis of GCSE results indicates that the Black African ethnic group contains some of the highest achieving language groups, but also some of the lowest. Analysing by language (see table 1) reveals that the lowest attaining group was Krio speakers in 2019, with only 40% gaining 5+ A*-C including English and maths. In contrast 100% of Ga speakers and 83% of Luganda and Swahili speakers met this standard.

Table 1: Difference in GCSE performance of Black African pupils by main language spoke at home (5+A*-C English and Maths)

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Luganda	83%	33%	29%	33%	60%	80%	100%	67%	83%	33%	75%
Krio	40%	83%	64%	30%	33%	60%	71%	63%	78%	50%	75%
Igbo	56%	77%	42%	77%	67%	75%	100%	86%	76%	80%	100%
Yoruba	64%	65%	61%	61%	66%	60%	82%	69%	75%	68%	39%
Ga	100%	n/a	50%	100%	67%	50%	83%	80%	75%	75%	64%
Tigrinya	56%	60%	83%	47%	85%	50%	60%	79%	67%	56%	75%
Twi-Fante	64%	54%	55%	61%	63%	62%	73%	72%	66%	84%	69%
Somali	53%	63%	54%	72%	55%	63%	76%	63%	61%	50%	48%
Swahili	83%	67%	50%	33%	75%	0%	50%	25%	50%	60%	40%
Lingala	58%	13%	27%	50%	46%	29%	89%	83%	45%	50%	0%
Amharic	60%	25%	75%	89%	100%	75%	80%	100%	100%	100%	75%
LA	53%	55%	56%	56%	57%	57%	66%	63%	61%	53%	54%
National	56%	56%	59%	57%	57%	62%	61%	59%	58%	55%	50%

*Caution: * Other African languages spoken by pupils who took GCSE examinations included Amharic, Tigrinya, Krio, Oromo, Arabic, Xhosa, Zulu, Hausa, Luo, Kikuyu, Manding, Runyakata, Temne. These language results have not been reported here because they have between 1 to 9 speakers which are too small to make a meaningful statistical interpretation. Care needs to be taken in the interpretation of the GCSE trend data of languages that have small numbers of speakers.*

Overall, the analysis by language category illuminates the spread of attainment within ethnic categories and suggests that some of the commonly used ethnic groupings may be too broad to be useful, and that language data can provide greater insight into which pupils may need support. In addition, the data confirms speakers such as Amharic are too small to make meaningful statistical inference, although at individual levels the pupils achieve well above the national average (See Demie 2015).

Factors influencing the achievement of Black African pupils in schools

Recent British studies have focussed on the relationship between factors such as gender, ethnicity, pupil mobility and free school meals and educational achievement, but the review of research suggests that there is little research into factors affecting the performance of Black African pupils (Demie 2015, 2019; Dustmann et al 2010. Previous studies (Demie 2015) attribute the roots of underachievement to several factors including poverty, lack of understanding of the British education system and lack of fluency in English. There is evidence many Black African families live in deprived neighbourhoods with overcrowded accommodation. In this research, three factors that are measurable and helpful in understanding the effect of background factors on attainment of Black African pupils in schools were considered – Stages of English proficiency, eligibility for free school meals (FSM) and pupil mobility.

English fluency and attainment

The English as an additional language learning need of Black African pupils varies greatly from beginners to advanced. Stages of English proficiency have been used to describe the different stages of English through which pupils progress. The measure of stages of proficiency used in the case study LA is five stages comprising New to English, Early Acquisition, Developing Competence, Competent and Fluent. These five stages are described in detail in Demie (2018). Table 2 give the average performance of Black African pupils by Stage of English proficiency. The data clearly shows that an important factor relating to ethnic background and African achievement is English fluency. One of the main reasons for Black African pupils' successful achievement at GCSE is that almost all the pupils are fluent in English. 40% of the Black African pupils in the LA schools are fully fluent in English, and about 15% are at Stage D level of fluency with little need for additional support. The evidence from the data also shows that no pupil at the beginner stage and early acquisition with considerable need for English language support achieved GCSE passes in English and maths compared to 38% at Stage C (Developing Competence), 59% at Stage D (competent) and 68% at Stage E (Fluent).

Table 2: 9 to 4 English & Maths Attainment by Ethnicity and Proficiency in English

Proficiency	2019			2018		
	GCSE Results %	Cohort	% of cohort	GCSE Results %	Cohort	% of cohort
Stage A - New to English	n/a	0	0%	0%	2	1%
Stage B - Early Acquisition	0%	11	2%	0%	4	1%
Stage C - Developing Competence	38%	34	6%	57%	28	5%
Stage D - Competent	59%	90	15%	69%	81	16%
Stage E - Fluent	68%	231	40%	65%	188	37%
English Only	67%	165	28%	66%	167	32%
All Pupils	64%	583	100%	65%	515	100%
Stage A-C- Not Fluent	31%	45	8%	49%	35	7%
Stage A-D	50%	135	23%	63%	116	23%
Stage A-E- EAL	61%	366	63%	64%	304	59%

Table 2 shows that fluency in English continues to have an influence on the performance of pupils with an EAL background. Overall empirical evidence suggests pupils in the early stages of fluency perform at very low levels, while African pupils who are reasonably proficient in English perform better, on average, than English only speakers.

These findings offer much encouragement for policy makers and school improvement practitioners. They demonstrate that African children do not face a large language barrier, and once that barrier is overcome, it is possible to attain good levels of achievement in all key stages.

Disadvantage and attainment of Black African pupils

One key factor affecting achievement of Black African pupils in English schools is the poverty factor associated with socio-economic status (Cassen and Kingdom, 2007; The Sutton Trust, 2009). The free school meals (FSM) variable is often used as a proxy measure of the extent of social deprivation in the background of pupils (Demie 20017, Gorard 2018). Of concern is that children from poorer homes do worse educationally than their classmates. The quantitative data gathered by the DfE

(2019) provides clear evidence that poverty and educational achievement are closely associated. The data showed that children who took advantage of free school meals (those from low income families) were less likely to reach the expected level in national tests than those from higher income families. Overall, in England, the gap in attainment between those eligible for free school meals and those who paid for a meal was 28 percentage points (40% and 68% respectively). There remains a significant gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils (Table 3).

Despite this national evidence, the Black African pupils experience relatively low level of disadvantage relative to national norms. The proportion of pupils taking GCSE in 2019 eligible for free school meals (FSM) was 9% compared to 13% of pupils nationally.

Table 3: Differences in attainment at KS4 for ethnic background and free school meals (FSM)

GCSE 9-4 2019	Case study LA				National			
	ALL	FSM	Non-FSM	Gap	ALL	FSM	Non-FSM	Gap
Black Caribbean	43%	32%	47%	15%	49%	34%	53%	19%
Black African	65%	59%	68%	9%	65%	55%	68%	13%
Indian	92%	n/a	92%	n/a	79%	64%	80%	16%
Bangladeshi	83%	67%	92%	25%	69%	60%	72%	12%
Chinese	81%	75%	83%	8%	87%	79%	88%	9%
Mixed White/Caribbean	54%	41%	63%	22%	54%	37%	59%	22%
Mixed White/Black African	76%	67%	78%	11%	64%	49%	67%	18%
White British	63%	36%	69%	33%	64%	34%	68%	34%
White Other	70%	63%	72%	9%	62%	47%	63%	16%
All	60%	50%	63%	13%	59%	40%	68%	28%

The evidence in the case study LA also supports the national evidence and indicates that there is a marked difference in GCSE performance between pupils eligible for free school meals and the most economically advantaged groups in schools at the end of secondary education. The gap was much smaller for Black African pupils at nine percentage points. For these groups of pupils, those eligible for FSM had similar levels of performance as found nationally, but for those who paid for a meal, their attainment was the same as that found in England overall. The LA data also shows that 36% of White British pupils eligible for free school meals achieved 9-4 grade in English and maths, compared with 69% of pupils who were not eligible. There is a gap of 33 percentage points for White British compared to an 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 is nine percentage points. White British pupils eligible for FSM in the LA do slightly better than their peers at a national level.

The LA data shows that there is a smaller gap than nationally for Black African pupils when examined by FSM status. This is due to Black African pupils in the LA eligible for FSM having higher levels of attainment than their peers nationally. Contrastingly, White British pupils in the LA and nationally have an extremely wide gap in attainment based on FSM status, suggesting that for Black African pupils other factors mitigate the effect of socio-economic disadvantage.

Pupil Mobility and Achievement

Mobile pupils are those who join or leave a school at a point other than at the age they would normally start or finish their education at a school. The significance of pupil mobility for some

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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