

**Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria  
(ESSPIN)**

**Assignment Report**

**Reflections on why basic education learning outcomes  
are declining in Nigeria**

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**Simeon Ogbonna**

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**esspin**  
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**UKaid**  
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## Acronyms

APC	All Peoples' Congress
CS	Composite Survey
DFID	Department for International Development
EGRA	Early grade reading assessments
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria
FME	Federal Ministry of Education
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDP	International development partners
IQTE	Islamiyya, Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education
MLA	Monitoring of learning achievements
NEDS	Nigeria Education Data Survey
NEI	Northern Education Initiative
NIPEP	Nigeria Partnership for Education Project
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PE	Political engagement
PEP	Primary Education Improvement Projects
SBMC	School Based Management Committee
SIP	School Improvement Programme
SMO	Social Mobilisation Officer
SSIT	State School Improvement Team
SSO	School Support Officer
TDNA	Teacher Development Needs Assessment
UBEP	Universal Basic Education Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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## Introduction

1. The Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) has been working over the past eight years to contribute to positive and sustainable change in the way in which government in Nigeria delivers education services. Its focus has been to enable institutions to bring about systemic change in the education system, leveraging Nigerian resources in support of state and federal education sector plans and building capacity to continuously improve education access, equity, and quality. ESSPIN's six partner states – Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara and Lagos – account for roughly 25% of Nigeria's total population and have responsibility for approximately 6 million children enrolled in over 17,000 primary schools, and an unspecified number of out-of-school children. Following an initial six-year cycle running from 2008 to 2014, ESSPIN was extended for a further 2.5 years, August 2014 to January 2017.
2. The overall impact of ESSPIN is measured by how much it is able to bring about improved learning outcomes for all children of basic education age in the six Nigerian partner states. To achieve this impact ESSPIN collaborated with the six partner state governments to design and implement an integrated School Improvement Programme (SIP) in public primary schools. The SIP focused on four interrelated streams of work:
  - strengthening the capability of primary schools to provide improved learning outcomes through professional development of teachers, head teachers, school development planning and provision of lesson plans and other instructional resources;
  - improving inclusive policies and practices in basic education through building the capacity of community members to participate in school improvement and creation of spaces for the concerns of women and children to be brought into decisions affecting their schools.
  - strengthening federal government systems
  - increasing the capability of states and local governments as regards the governance and management of schools
3. Nigeria faces a perennial problem of low learning outcomes at all the levels of education. Results of different learning assessment surveys at the basic level (the concern of this paper) conducted between 1996 and 2016 not only indicate low attainments in literacy and numeracy, they also indicate declining trends. In fact, recent surveys such as the Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS) in 2015, and ESSPIN Composite Survey 3 (CS3) in 2016 revealed that despite efforts by international development partners (IDPs) and governments to shore up quality, learning outcomes remain low and appear to be declining rather than improving. For example, the NEDS (National Population Commission, 2015) indicated that literacy achievements measured at the most rudimentary level of ability to read all or some words in a sentence in either English or any of Nigeria's major indigenous languages (Hausa,

Igbo, or Yoruba) was very low and had even declined when compared with performance ten and five years back, i.e. NEDS, 2004 and 2010.

4. The same trend is replicated in numeracy achievements as the NEDS also indicated that the number of children who could demonstrate rudimentary knowledge in basic numeracy was lower than in 2010. Results of composite surveys of ESSPIN's School Improvement Programme (SIP) conducted in 2012, 2014 and 2016 also indicate that even in ESSPIN intervention states achievement of children in literacy and numeracy have not matched expectations as they remained low and in some instances stayed the same or declined over the six-year period.
5. Early grade reading assessments (EGRAs) conducted in six northern states (Bauchi, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano and Katsina) at various times (RTI International, 2011 & 2014) revealed very low literacy achievements among P3 children in both English and Hausa. For example, the Northern Education Initiative (NEI) EGRAs using a sample of P3 children from Bauchi and Sokoto states concluded that "after three years of instruction, the vast majority of P3 [pupils] have not mastered any foundational reading skills" such as letter-sound-identification, initial letter sound or phonemic awareness; syllable reading, familiar word reading and non-word reading (RTI, 2011). The EGRAs conducted in Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano and Katsina in preparation for the states participation in the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)-funded Nigeria Partnership for Education Project (NIPEP) came to the same conclusion. According to the report: "Although scores are exceedingly low across all subtests for both government and IQTE schools, the results of government school pupils are strikingly poor. Across all states, pupils attending IQTE centres generally outperformed their government school peers, and in some cases, by a wide margin. In most states, there was no significant difference between Hausa and English language abilities except for listening comprehension" (RTI International, 2014, p. 2).
6. A pilot survey report released recently by LEARNigeria (2016) based on a sample of 2,182 children aged 5 to 15 years in 969 households from two local governments in Kano and Lagos also revealed very low literacy and numeracy attainments. For example, the report indicated that only 10% of all children aged 5 to 15 from the Kano State sample "can read at grade 2 story level while 9 of them cannot read" in Hausa. For numeracy, the survey reported that "only 6.7% of children aged 8 can multiply at grade 2 level while only 45.5% of children aged 15 can multiply at grade 2 level."
7. Results of the MLA components of ESSPIN Composite surveys (2014 and 2016) that tested the acquisition of literacy and numeracy by children from the six focus states (Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara and Lagos) concluded that performance appeared to have worsened

over time, compared with performance in 2012, when the tests were first conducted (Cameron et al, 2016).

8. The question to ask is: Why are Nigerian children not learning as expected? Or even more focused, why are children in the ESSPIN focus states not exhibiting expected mastery of literacy and numeracy competencies? To attempt an answer, this short paper will:
  - (i) Chart the trend of learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy assessments over time beginning from the first published monitoring of learning achievements in 1996 (Falayajo et al, 1996) to the most recent ones (National Population Commission, 2015; Cameron et al, 2016);
  - (ii) Explore contextual factors that might be responsible for low and largely stalled levels of literacy and numeracy acquisition across the states; and
  - (iii) Finally, interrogate whether (or not) ESSPIN has made a difference in children's learning despite the strong contextual factors which continue to impinge on the rate at which learning is achieved.

## Trends in Learning Outcomes

9. Academic achievements are a critical measure of quality learning outcomes at the different levels of education. At the basic education level, it is important whether children attain minimum benchmarks in literacy, numeracy, science, and other life-skills. In Nigeria national assessments of learning achievement have been few and far between. The first nation-wide assessment of learning at the primary level of education in Nigeria was done in 1996 by the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) supported by UNESCO and UNICEF in three subject areas Literacy, Numeracy, and Life-Skills for primary 4 only (Falayejo et al, 1996).
10. Follow-up monitoring of learning achievements (MLA) was carried out in 2003 (Nigeria Education Sector Analysis, 2004) and 2011 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015) at primary classes 4 and 6.
11. The Universal Basic Education Programme conducted its assessment of learning in 2001 and 2003 (Universal Basic Education Programme, n.d; Universal Basic Education Commission, 2007).
12. International development partners also supported or conducted other learning assessments. Examples include the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) early grade reading assessments (RTI International, 2011; 2014) and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) ESSPIN Composite surveys (Cameron, et al 2016).

### Monitoring of Learning Achievements by the Federal Ministry of Education, 1996-2011

13. The results of the MLAs by the Federal Ministry of Education based on samples of primary four and six (for 2004 and 2011 assessments) pupils in all 37 states and the FCT are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 below. For brevity only the mean percentage scores for overall national mean scores and such equity indicators as location, gender, school type and pre-primary status (i.e. whether a child attended nursery school or not) will be used as reference points.
14. At the primary four level, information in Table 1 below speaks of low achievements in both literacy and numeracy over the three MLA assessments. What is worrisome is that Nigerian children lagged other African children when the results of the 1996 P4 assessment were compared with those of 12 other African countries (World Bank, 2003). The 2011 MLA painted a very grim picture of the P4 children's performances when it concluded that:

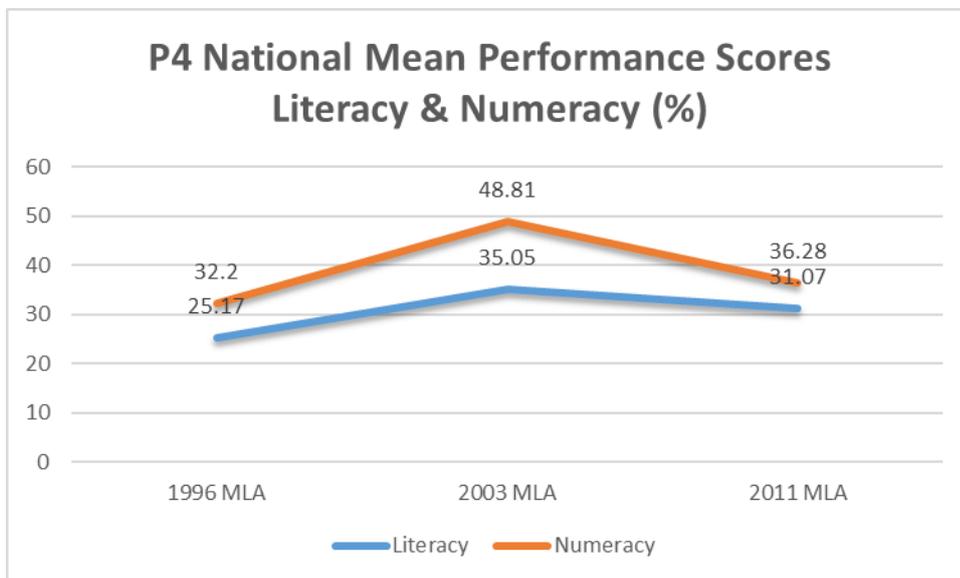
“The vast majority of the primary four pupils tested scored below 50% in both literacy and numeracy tests. [Literally], barely one in five of the primary four pupils demonstrated the competency expected by the national curriculum for the level of education they are attending.” Federal Ministry of Education, 2016, p. vi).

**Table 1 FME Primary 4 MLA Literacy and Numeracy Percentage Mean Scores 1996-2011**

Indicators	Literacy			Numeracy		
	1996 MLA	2003 MLA	2011 MLA	1996 MLA	2003 MLA	2011 MLA
<b>National mean score (%)</b>	25.17	35.05	31.07	32.20	43.81	36.28
<b>Mean score Girls (%)</b>	25.76	35.36	31.38	31.89	33.74	37.00
<b>Mean Score Boys (%)</b>	24.79	35.45	31.48	32.42	33.52	36.98
<b>Mean Score Urban (%)</b>	28.89	35.65	32.70	35.00	34.33	38.29
<b>Mean Score Rural (%)</b>	22.59	35.05	30.78	30.33	35.21	36.28
<b>Mean Score Public (%)</b>	22.17	33.96	31.35	30.13	30.63	39.78
<b>Mean Score Private (%)</b>	40.76	46.65	32.35	43.08	43.12	36.25
<b>Mean Score Attended Nursery (%)</b>	NA	43.43	32.88	NA	36.88	33.19
<b>Mean Score Not attended nursery (%)</b>	NA	34.64	30.36	NA	33.31	32.29

15. Data from the table shows both slight improvements in performance and declines. For example, for literacy there was a slight improvement in performance between 1996 (national percentage mean score of 25.17) and 2003 assessments (national percentage mean score of 35.05). However, there was a decline in performance from 35.05 in 2003 to 31.07 in the 2011 MLA. Achievement in numeracy which seemed higher followed a similar trend improving from 32.62 in 1996 to 48.81 in 2003 but declining to 36.28 in the 2011 MLA. Figure 1 below graphically shows the trend.

**Figure 1 P4 Literacy & Numeracy Performance Trends 1996 - 2011 MLA**



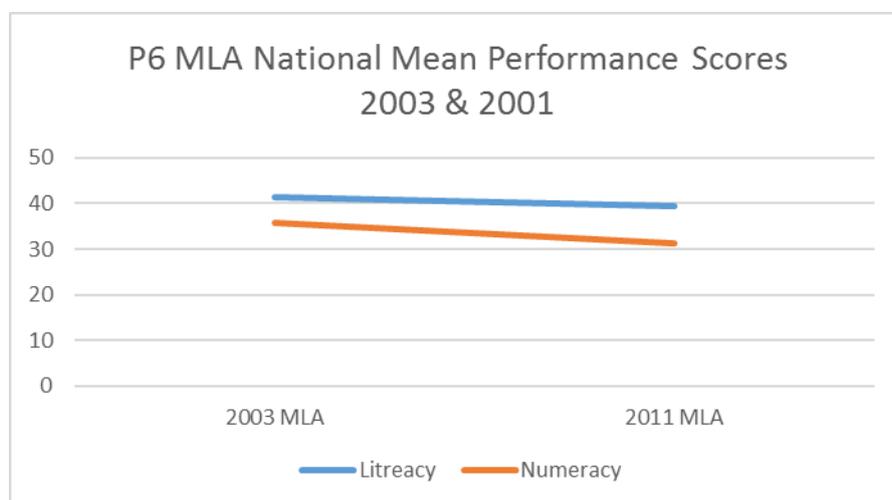
16. It is instructive to note that the low achievements cut across all categories of learners irrespective of gender (boys or girls), type (public or private), location (urban or rural) and pre-primary status (whether a pupil attended nursery school or not). Data from Table 1 reveals that no category of learners met the 50 percent mark.

17. At the primary six level, the MLA has been conducted two times, in 2003 and 2011. Table 2 below shows the national mean percentage scores and disaggregated data by gender, school location, type of school and pre-primary status. Information from the table indicates decline in national mean percentage score in literacy from 41.45 in 2003 to 39.50 in 2011. Performance in numeracy also declined from 35.73 in 2003 to 31.19 2011. Figure 2 charts the trend.

**Table 2 FME Primary 6 MLA Literacy and Numeracy Percentage Mean Scores 2003 -2011**

Indicators	Literacy		Numeracy	
	2003 MLA	2011 MLA	2003 MLA	2011 MLA
National mean score (%)	41.45	39.50	35.73	31.19
Mean score Girls (%)	42.22	40.49	35.25	NA
Mean Score Boys (%)	41.71	39.90	35.56	NA
Mean Score Urban (%)	44.61	40.64	37.19	34.53
Mean Score Rural (%)	39.10	39.84	33.51	32.90
Mean Score Public (%)	44.61	40.11	35.09	35.79
Mean Score Private (%)	48.17	40.68	40.35	32.84
Mean Score Attended Nursery (%)	47.37	43.51	40.05	33.19
Mean Score Not attended nursery (%)	41.00	37.19	34.91	32.29

**Figure 2 P6 Literacy & Numeracy Performance Trends 1966 - 2011 MLA**



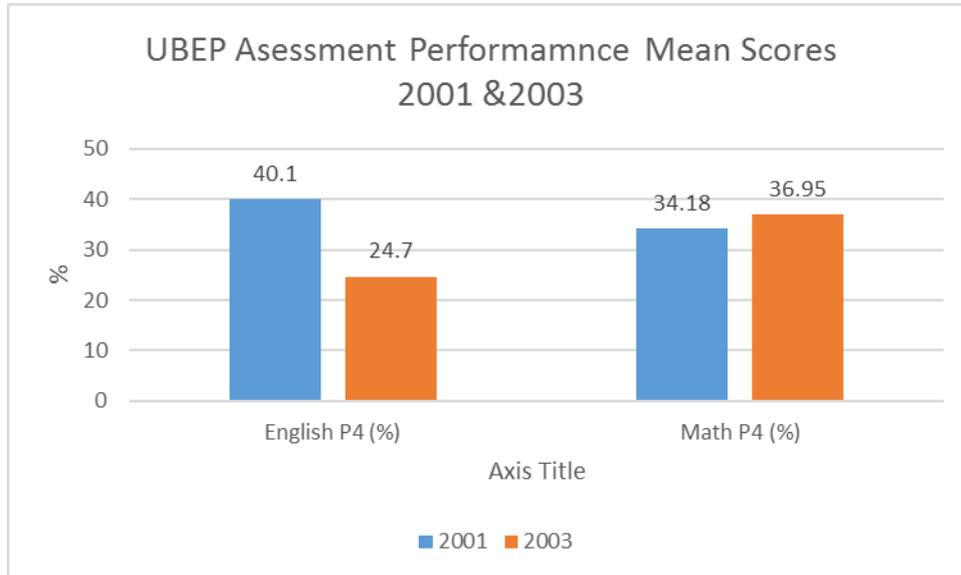
### Universal Basic Education Programme National Assessments 2001 and 2003

18. The Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) conducted two national assessments in 2001 (Universal Basic Education Programme, n.d) and 2003 (Universal Basic Education Programme, 2007). The 2001 national assessments drew samples from public and private

primary four pupils in all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Only two subjects English and Mathematics were tested. Questionnaires were also administered to the same pupils, their teachers, and head teachers. The objective of the study was “to assess the quality of primary education seven years into the implementation of the [First and Second] Primary Education Improvement Projects (PEP I and PEP II) and 12 months of the inception of the Universal Basic Education Programme” (Universal Basic Education Programme, n.d: P.iv).

19. The results of the assessment were disaggregated by gender, location of school (urban, semi-urban and rural) and type of school (public, private and Islamiyah). The national mean percentage score for English was 41.10, while that of Mathematics was 34.18. The study concluded that performance of pupils in the two subjects were generally low. The low performance was attributed to poor reading abilities of the pupils and their teachers, lack of interest in school and school subjects due to poor school environment and lack of teaching and learning resources in schools. Notwithstanding the general low performance, pupils from schools in urban locations and those attending private schools outperformed those from rural and semi-urban locations and those attending public and Islamiyah schools.
20. The UBEP 2003 national assessment was a follow-up to the 2001 assessment. In addition to English and Mathematics, it also tested the sampled pupils from the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory in the two other primary school core subjects, Primary Science, and Social Studies. Primary six and five pupils were also tested, in addition to the primary four pupils tested in 2001. The objective of the assessment was to “assess the level of performance of primary four, five and six pupils in English, Mathematics, Primary Science and Social Studies at the national, state and sub-population levels” (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2007, p. vi). Analysis of performance level for primary four in English and Mathematics (for which there is comparative data for 2001 and 2003) revealed low and even declining performance (at least for English literacy) when compared with performance in the 2001 assessment (Figure 3). The national mean percentage score for English was 24.70 down from the score of 40.10 in 2001. Performance in Mathematics stayed almost the same at 36.95 compared with 34: 18 in 2001.

**Figure 3 UBEP National Assessment Trend for English Literacy & Math Primary 4 2001 Vs 2003**

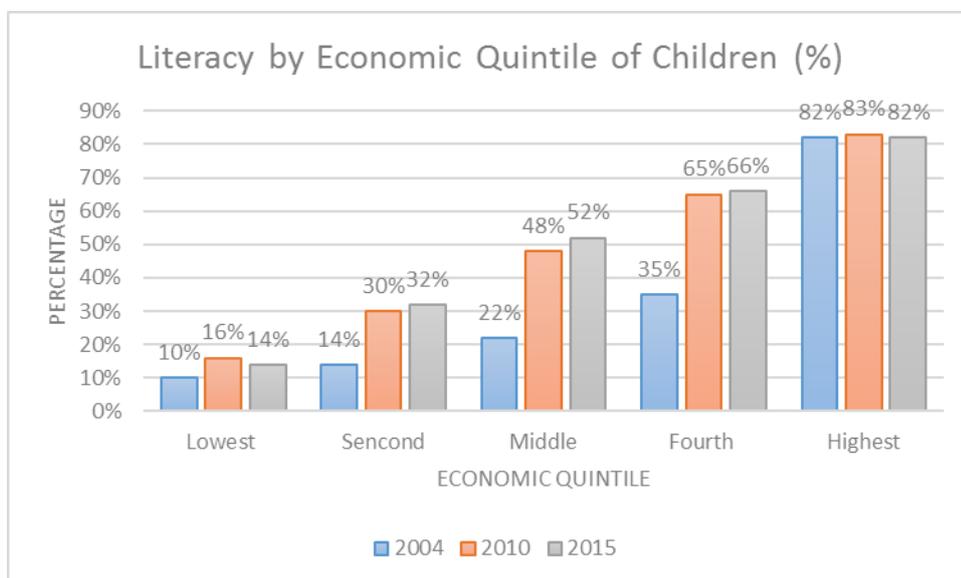


**Evidence from the Nigeria Education Data Surveys (2005, 2010 and 2015)**

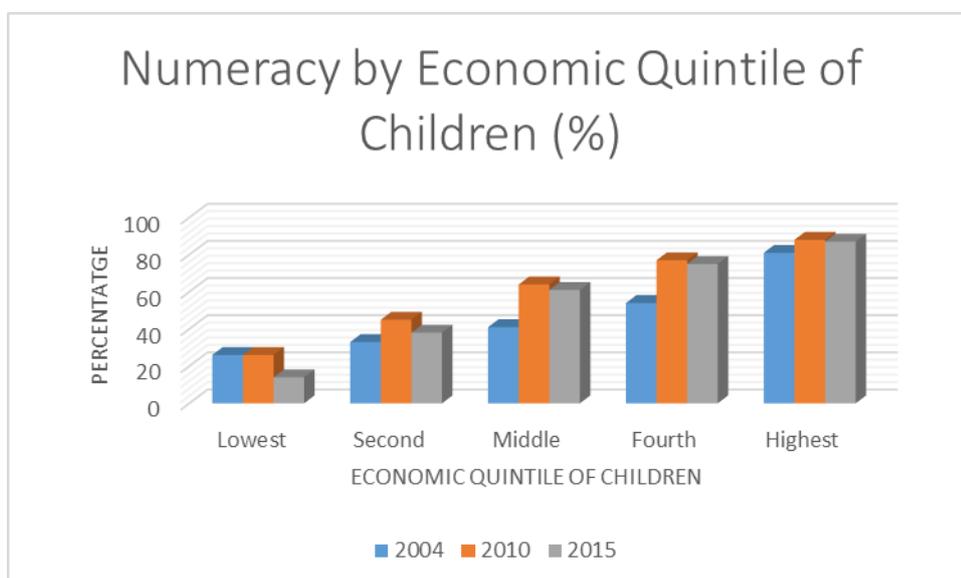
21. With the support of international development partners and in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of education and other MDAs, the National Population Commission has conducted three household surveys between 2004 and 2015, popularly known as Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS). The NEDS among other variables assesses the literacy and numeracy levels of children aged 5-15. The NEDS reduced demonstration of literacy and numeracy skills to their most rudimentary levels. For literacy, a child is said to be literate if she could read at least one of three words in English or one of three National languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba) on a presented flashcard. For numeracy, it is the ability to sum a single digit addition problem.
22. Of course, given this limited view of literacy, the authors of the surveys usually warn that the results of the surveys be interpreted with some caution. Notwithstanding the above limitation, the surveys provide an insight into the literacy and numeracy situation at the basic level of education. All the same, the results reveal very low literacy and numeracy levels, especially among children from poor households, living in rural areas, attending government schools and from northern states.
23. The surveys reveal that literacy levels among children in the 5-15 age groups are very low. Figures 3 and 4 below capture the results of NEDS over 2004, 2010 and 2015. Like the MLA or UBEP assessments already highlighted above, the results indicate low and declining performance when performance in 2015 is compared with performance in 2004 and 2010, especially for children living in poverty and in rural areas. The results clearly suggest that the

further down the line children are on the socio-economic ladder, the worse their literacy and numeracy levels.

**Figure 4 NEDS Literacy Performance by Children’s Economic Status**



**Figure 5 NEDS Numeracy Performance by Children’s Economic Status**

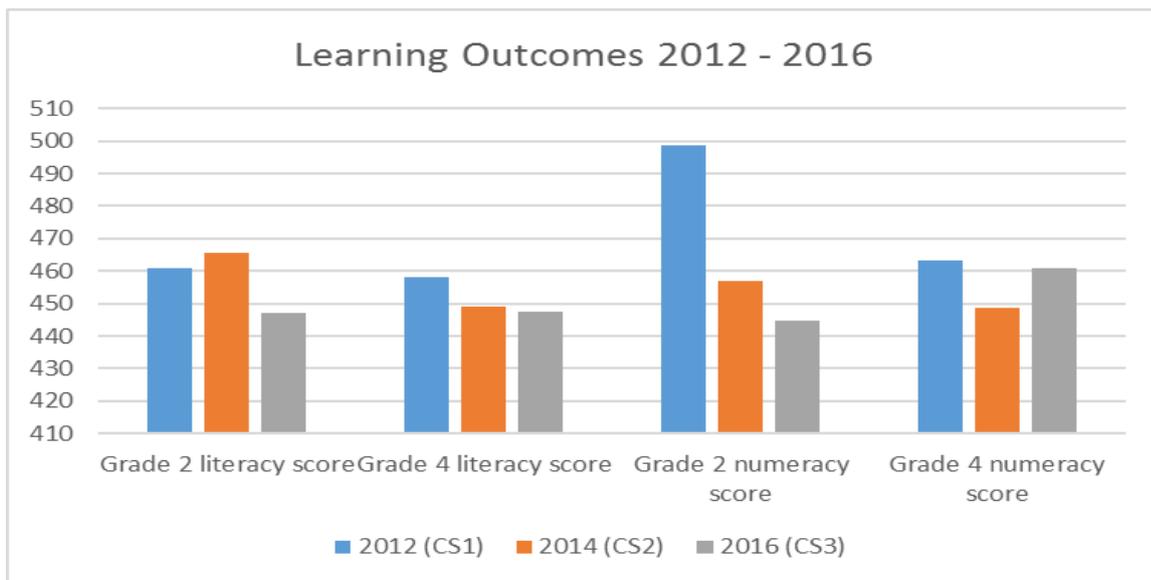


### ESSPIN MLA Results

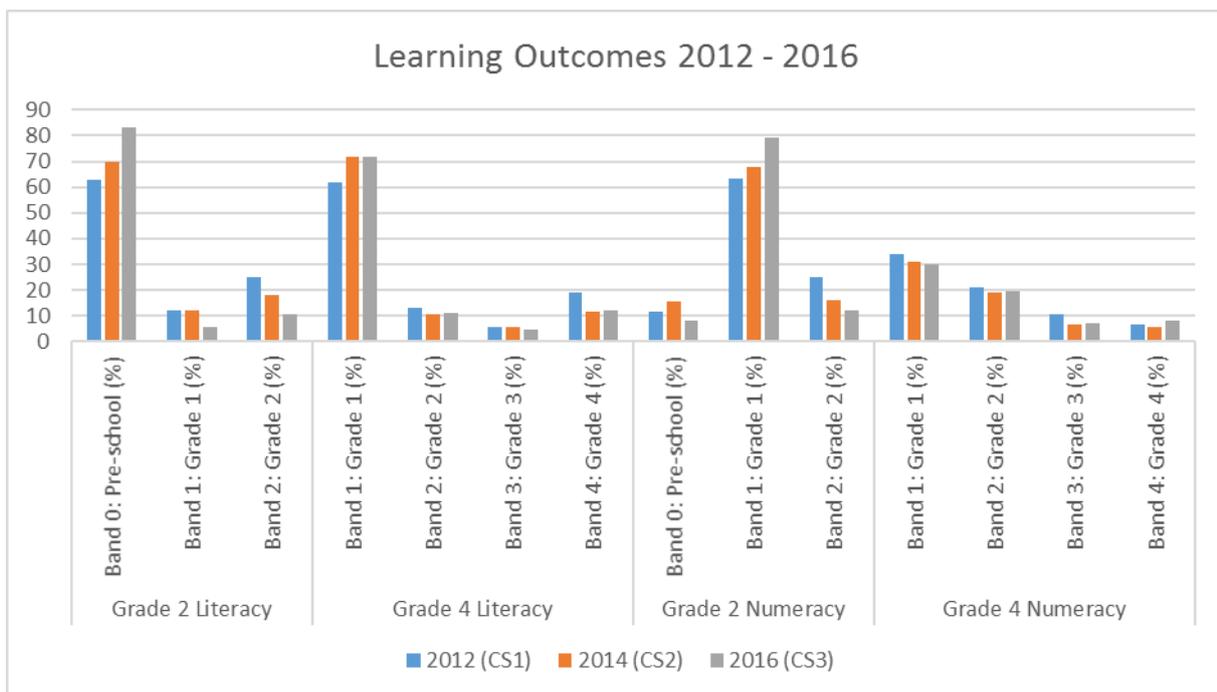
24. The MLA component of the ESSPIN Composite Surveys was aimed at measuring what impact the SIP has made on the learning of children. The assumption was that the children’s learning outcomes would improve over time if the head teachers operated more effectively, teachers delivered more competent lessons, SBMCs became more inclusive and supported their schools to improve and more schools met overall school quality standards.

25. The result of the 2016 survey indicates that learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy are yet to reach optimal levels. Using the item response theory (IRT) model of analysis, the 2016 survey concluded that the trend in learning outcomes between 2012 and 2016 was mixed. As figures 6 and 7 below indicates, grade 4 numeracy was better in 2016 than in 2014 and 2012, but grade 4 literacy remained almost the same over the three surveys. At grade 2 level, literacy and numeracy scores did not change between 2012 and 2016.

**Figure 6 ESSPIN CS Learning Outcomes 2012-2016**



**Figure 7 ESSPIN CS Learning Outcomes 2012 - 2016 by band**



## Contextual Factors for Low Learning Outcomes

26. Surveys (MLA, Teacher development needs assessment, Annual School Census, head teacher and teacher observations, School Based Management Committee functionality) conducted by ESSPIN in 2008-10 to establish baselines reveal some of the contextual factors behind underachievement in primary education, at least before and up until the start of ESSPIN. The surveys found that:

- A greater majority of the teachers lacked basic teaching skills and subject content knowledge and indeed performed abysmally in tests in literacy and numeracy set at grade 4 level of knowledge and skills.
- Head teachers lacked the skills and competencies to effectively lead and manage their schools and in fact spent over 60% of their time on a school day doing things that were not related to teaching and learning.
- Schools lacked functional School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) that could enable parents and other community members to support the development of their local schools.
- Many schools lacked the capacity to provide quality learning experiences for all children.
- Learning outcomes among children were very low, especially for girls from northern Nigeria, children from rural areas and poor homes.
- Basic infrastructures were either lacking or in abysmal conditions.
- School development planning was not practised in most schools.
- Credible education data to inform planning and decision making were not available.
- Education budgets did not prioritise schools, especially teaching and learning.
- Inclusive education policies were non-existent at federal and state levels, while inclusive practices at school level were very low.
- Many states failed to draw down the UBE Intervention Funds that could have helped to address infrastructure shortages.

27. What is at issue though is not that things were this bad at the inception of ESSPIN but that learning outcomes are still low even in ESSPIN-partner states, which is perhaps an indication that schools and the states in which they operate are still exposed to conditions that make it difficult for SIP inputs to translate into improved learning for children in an optimal length of time. Some of these contextual factors that might be undermining efforts to shore up learning outcomes, which must be addressed to reach optimal learning outcomes, are highlighted below.

28. **The teacher factor:** One critical factor that many observers have implicated for low and declining academic achievements of children is the teacher factor. This deals with many aspects including the qualifications of teachers, competences, pre-service and in-service training of teachers, their numbers, recruitment, and deployment. Even in the southern

states (e.g. Lagos and Enugu) where most teachers have the minimum teaching qualification of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), most teachers still lack the requisite skills and competencies to deliver the primary school curriculum as the 2010 teacher needs development assessment (TDNA) and the teachers' tests component of the Composite surveys in 2012, 2014 and 2016 revealed. Matters are worse in the northern states (e.g. Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa) where many teachers still lack the minimum teaching qualification. The skills gap has been largely exacerbated by the prevailing mode of pre-service teacher education where most teachers are trained as specialists in two subjects, which could include subjects that are not taught in primary schools (such as economics, political science, physics, chemistry, biology) but end up as generalist teachers in the classroom. Even in the northern states where specialist teaching is the norm (e.g. Kano and Jigawa), teachers end up teaching subjects they did not specialise in.

29. Add to this the persistent shortage of teachers resulting from freezes on recruitment (often in the context of increasing pupil enrolments) giving rise to very high teacher-pupil ratios. The teacher shortage is often worsened by inefficient teacher deployment practices, which short change schools in rural areas, even though very high teacher-pupil ratios are also rife in large urban schools in Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa. In schools in remote rural areas in Jigawa, Kano and Kaduna, we often find schools with enrolment of 180 to 200 children with only the head teacher and another teacher who in some cases is the Arabic teacher with no training in secular education. ESSPIN's efforts to reform teacher professional development in the past eight years have had to grapple with teachers who might be untrainable in the first place, who retire soon after training without replacement or who see training as an end and not a means to an end—children's learning. The teacher factor is critical in shoring up the literacy achievement of primary children and the beginning point should be overhauling the curriculum of pre-service education at colleges of education and faculties of education of universities.
30. **Poor quality instruction:** The poor results reported by the successive assessments are reflective of the poor quality of instruction in primary schools. Teachers are not exclusively to blame for poor performance of their pupils. The teachers themselves are products of a system of pre-service (and in-service) education that does not equip them with skills to effectively teach literacy and numeracy at the primary level of education. The teachers are also victims of an education system that pays lip service to the literacy and numeracy development of children as evident in the paucity of resources in most government schools and lack of policies and guidelines on the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy (Ogbonna, 2010). It is important to ensure that schools are provided with clear policies and guidelines on the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy. It also must be ensured that resources are made available to both pupils and teachers. Finally, teachers also must be supported to use resources to teach literacy and numeracy effectively.

31. **Increases in enrolments (predominantly in the northern states):** ESSPIN intervention over the past eight years brought additional 717,531 children into schools across the six states, driven mainly by increased enrolment in Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa states. The Annual School Census (ASC) data indicated high increase in enrolment between 2009 and 2013, especially in the three northwest states, which raised average pupil-teacher ratios-- Kaduna (49), Jigawa (55) and Kano (69). Apart from high teacher-pupil ratios, increases in enrolments also have implications for classrooms, furniture, and textbook ratios and so forth. As CS3 concludes, "Given such high pupil-teacher ratios, one might not expect the teaching and learning environment to have improved much even if there have been small decreases in pupil-teacher ratio between 2013 and 2014" (Cameron et al, 2016).
32. **Government policies and actions:** Government policies and actions also impact negatively on teaching and learning. Take the example of Kaduna State where the government's recent school feeding programme has led to unprecedented enrolments that outstripped existing facilities. Pupil turn-out in some schools in Kaduna is such that teachers cannot find where to stand to deliver lessons in classrooms. It has been reported that many children just come in, eat their meals, and go home shortly after without staying to learn. This situation can also be replicated in other states. In Kwara, the government's failure to fund school support visits throughout 2015/16 academic session meant a reduction in the quality and quantity of support received by teachers and head teachers. In Enugu, the education commissioner's policy of sending back personnel who were working as school support officers (SSOs) to the classrooms left teachers without needed support for some time.
33. **Elections and political transitions:** The elections in 2015 and the transitions they occasioned in states are also implicated for low and stalled learning outcomes. In three of the ESSPIN states (Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa) there was a change of leadership from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Peoples' Congress (APC). This led to a long and hard transition which swept away not only political appointees but also some of the technocrats such as directors ESSPIN had done political engagement (PE) with. In Kaduna, for example, apart from dealing with new commissioners and advisers, SUBEB chair and all board members, all 23 LGEA education secretaries and some directors were relieved of their posts. This meant doing PE all over again with new personnel in the states. It took many of the new actors some time to understand the ESSPIN approach. In many states teacher training and other critical activities were halted. In Kaduna, for example, teacher professional development was put on hold for about one year. In Jigawa, spending from the TPD fund used for teacher development was put on hold by the new governor and only lifted in September 2016. Even in the other three states where the same party retained power (Lagos, Enugu and Kwara) there was still loss of momentum as SUBEBs were dissolved and never reconstituted for upwards of one year. Add to all this the losses in learning arising

from politically motivated holidays declared by state governors in the run up to the elections in 2015.

34. **Insecurity:** The education sector in three ESSPIN states (Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa) like other sectors has been affected to varying degrees by the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. Two of the states (Kaduna and Kano) witnessed major incidents that negatively affected schooling. In Kano State, attacks had occurred in or near schools leading to unplanned closures of schools and loss of learning time. In Kaduna insurgent attacks resulted in curfews, which led to school closures and loss of learning time. Kaduna is still witnessing attacks related to herdsmen and cattle rustlers in certain local government areas, which sometimes affects schools and schooling. In the 2014/15 school year, whole communities were found to have emigrated due to repeated violent attacks.
35. **The burden of poverty:** Children's socio-economic backgrounds have been reported as critical factors in academic achievements in Nigeria. The NEDS (2004, 2010 and 2015) reported that literacy and numeracy levels are worse for children from the lowest and second lowest economic quintiles. The Federal Ministry of Education MLAs found that children who attended nursery schools out performed their counterparts who did not. Most studies also reported that children attending privately owned schools performed significantly better than those attending government primary schools. In Nigeria attending nursery school and private schools are both indicative of a parent's belonging to between the middle and highest economic quintiles. Such children are also more likely to have textbooks and other learning resources, parental support for their education and private tutorial after school. Contrast the above scenario with children from the lower economic quintile whose parents might not be literate, attending a government school, receive no parental support, might be taught by an un-or under-qualified teacher among other disadvantages.
36. The burden is more in the northwest and northeast where studies have shown the incidence of poverty to be higher. In fact, the ESSPIN learning outcome results ought to be considered positive as ESSPIN's work had been to support government schools in Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa to improve learning opportunities for all children. In the southern states, government schools have been shown to be patronised more by rural dwellers and the urban poor. In rural and semi-urban areas, parents who can afford it now patronise private schools which have become more common even in rural areas in states such as Enugu and Lagos, a situation largely responsible for low enrolment in government schools in those states. In fact, the ESSPIN effect has been more as indicated in Figure 9 in raising learning outcomes for children from the lowest economic quintile and suffering other forms of exclusion.
37. **The challenge of language:** The language question in basic education is one that has cast a dark shadow on learning outcomes. The 1996 MLA clearly implicated poor facility in English,

the language of the assessment, as the main cause of poor achievement in the literacy and numeracy tests. According to the report:

The majority of the pupils could not read English and therefore most probably did not understand what they were expected to do. The children had little or no real exposure to listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. It was observed during the administration of the test, for instance, that interactions between teachers and pupils even during English lessons were carried out almost entirely in the [mother tongue] in most schools, contrary to the stipulation of the National Policy on Education that English be used as a medium of instruction from primary four upwards. (Falayajo et al. 1997: 79).

38. That quote also reveals the contradictions that have characterised language education policy and practice in primary education in Nigeria. First, children are by policy expected to learn content in their home, native or first language in early primary (grades 1-3) and progressively transit to English from the fourth grade, while learning English as a school subject only (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). What it means in practice is that children were tested in English in grade 4 after learning in the native or first language (L1) for the preceding three years. However, the language in education problem goes deeper than that and often hampers effective learning in schools. For one, both English and L1 literacy programmes are not strong features of the public primary school system. In fact, it has been suggested that many teachers themselves, especially in the northeast and northwest, are not sufficiently literate in both English and the L1. Moreover, teachers are left to figure out for themselves how to manage the medium transition anticipated by the policy without any help or guidance. The lack of teaching and learning materials in local languages is also often underestimated.
39. Six issues are critical with respect to language as a vehicle for learning in primary education: (a) children, especially in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa must have early literacy in Hausa; (b) the natural way globally in which children learn content through their L1, at least in the early grades, must be exploited to improve teaching and learning in the early grades; (c) teachers need to be trained and supported to teach L1 literacy; (d) L1 literacy materials need to be developed and made available to teachers and pupils; (e) children must be assessed in L1, if they learn in L1; and (f) English L2 literacy must be introduced at the right time using appropriate methodologies. L1 literacy can reinforce and help to consolidate L2 literacy and vice versa, if properly planned and handled.
40. **School/classroom conditions:** School and classroom conditions for many children and their teachers remain poor and uninspiring. Children taking lessons sitting on the floor, especially in the rural areas is still common place. Many schools still lack separate toilets for girls, boys, and teachers. Sources of good drinking water is still a luxury for most schools.

41. **Textbooks and other learning resources:** Various surveys and observations have revealed that Nigerian schools lack vital textbooks and other resources that facilitate teaching and learning. Yet children's access to textbooks and other learning resources correlate positively with learning achievements (RTI, 2011). In some schools in the north, it is quite common to see children in classrooms without writing materials—exercise books and pencils/biros.
42. **Funding challenges:** The ESSPIN SIP model is predicated on a pilot largely funded by ESSPIN and subsequently rolled out to other schools with funding from the partner states through their annual budgets and federal sources. In practice, state funding did not match expectations in terms of quantum and timely release, not minding the overall modest leverage that has been reported. States were very slow in meeting the conditions for the release of federal matching funds from the UBE Intervention Fund for infrastructure. The funding situation has been worsened by the current economic recession which has seen states and local governments' share of funds from the federation account drastically reduced. The result is that states are not able to release budgeted funds for school improvement. Even teachers and other state workers are being owed arrears of salaries in some states, a situation that may have worsened teaching and learning since 2015.
43. **The challenge of going to scale and timing of intervention:** ESSPIN achieved its objective of reaching all schools in the six partner states, but that may have been done at a cost as it is often difficult for quality to keep pace with quantity. By 2016 each of the six States had rolled out state-wide school improvement programmes, investing a total of £21.2m between July 2012 and end of September 2016. However, individual states preferred and focused on aspects of the school improvement package, rather than the integrated whole, a reason SBMC development did not keep pace with teacher and head teacher development in some states, for example, or why direct school funds (DFS) never materialised in many of the states.
44. The tendency by states to 'water down' the SIP package by reducing number of training days for teachers or SBMCs, reducing number of school support visits, increasing number of schools per school support officer (SSO) or social mobilisation officer (SMO) due to exigencies of funding must have also taken a toll on learning outcomes. For example, whereas head teachers and teachers received 12 days of direct support a year during the pilot phase, only 6 days a year are currently provided based on government budget envelopes. Similarly, members of State School Improvement Teams (SSITs) now receive fewer days of training based on introduction of relatively large numbers of LGEA based School Support Officers (SSOs) whose training needs must be accommodated within existing funding envelopes.
45. Another consequence of working at scale is the inevitable adoption of a cascade model for delivering training and support activities to an ever increasing number of schools. Whereas SSITs trained head teachers and teachers directly during the pilot phase, SSOs have been

introduced into the support chain during the expansion phase. SSOs receive their professional development support from SSITs and then take charge of day-to-day support of head teachers and teachers. SSOs tend to be less qualified professionally than SSITs, so the quality of support received by head teachers and teachers is weakened.

46. **Lack of national framework for monitoring learning achievement:** It must be acknowledged that MLA in Nigeria is still at its rudimentary stages and largely donor driven. It's only the UBEP assessments that were not either donor led or supported. It also lacks coordination as different stakeholders tend to conduct assessments based on their agenda and need. The result is duplication of efforts with the inherent wastage of scarce resources. For instance, in 2003 both the Federal Ministry of Education and the Universal Basic Education conducted separate assessments whose results are not comparable because there was no shared understanding of English literacy and numeracy. In fact, the organisations had different definitions of literacy and numeracy which in turn defined what skills were tested, methodologies, instruments used to collect data, mode of analysis and interpretation of results. For learning assessments to move beyond the rudimentary level there is need for cooperation and coordination of efforts between the various levels and agencies of government on the one hand and the international development partners on the other hand. This will ensure that results are comparable and trends easily charted. ESSPIN has been supporting the Federal Ministry of Education in this direction, but more needs to be done to integrate learning assessment into the education system through policies, strategies, plans and funding.

## The ESSPIN Effect

47. This section of the paper explores the effects the ESSPIN flagship, the SIP, has had on the learning of children in the six partner states. The simple question to ask is: are children learning more and better because of ESSPIN?

## What ESSPIN Composite Surveys Show

48. At two yearly intervals, a Composite Survey was conducted to assess the effects of ESSPIN's integrated School Improvement Programme (SIP), and to report on the quality of education in the six ESSPIN-supported states. The first Composite Survey was conducted in 2012. Two others were conducted in 2014 and 2016. The school level outcome indicators to measure ESSPIN effects include head teacher effectiveness, school development planning, trends in inclusiveness, functionality of School-Based Management Committees, teacher competence and overall school quality. The impact indicator measured children's learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. The headline results over the three Composite surveys for the outcome indicators (Cameron et al, 2016) revealed that:

- Head teachers in schools that have had more ESSPIN intervention are much more effective than those in schools with little ESSPIN intervention
- School development planning improved dramatically especially since 2014. Schools which have had more ESSPIN intervention do school development planning much better than those with less intervention.
- Schools with more ESSPIN intervention are more likely than those with less intervention to have partly met inclusiveness standards.
- School-based management committees (SBMCs) have become much more functional since 2012 or 2014, and are also more inclusive of women and children. ESSPIN intervention is associated with much better-functioning and inclusive SBMCs.
- Teachers have become more competent since 2014, although not compared with 2012. Teachers' test scores in English and mathematics have significantly worsened since 2014. Teachers trained through ESSPIN have better test scores and are more likely to use teaching aids, summarise their lessons, and test learners' knowledge.
- Overall school quality has improved since 2012, according to the composite measure based on head teacher effectiveness, school development planning, SBMC functionality, and teacher competence. Each year of ESSPIN intervention is associated with an increase of around 10 percentage points in the proportion of schools that meet the quality standard.

49. The summary data for the outcome indicators is as shown in Tables 3 and 4 below.

**Table 3 Change over time: key indicators in 2012, 2014, 2016**

	2012 (CS1)	2014 (CS2)	2016 (CS3)	Change 2012-16	Change 2014-16
Effective head teacher (%)	13.6	14.2	17.8	+4.1	+3.6
School development planning (%)	3.8	7.4	18.6	+14.8*	+11.3*
Inclusive (%)	18.8	10.5	11.4	-7.4*	+0.9
Functioning SBMC (%)	21.7	30.9	44.1	+22.4*	+13.2*
Competent teachers (%)	69.7	57.4	66.8	-2.9	+9.4*
Competent teachers (new measure, %)		21.0	20.5	n/a	-0.5
Good quality school (%)	3.9	8.3	17.9	+14.0*	+9.6*
Good quality school (new measure, %)		4.6	5.4	n/a	+0.9
Grade 4 numeracy score	463.1	448.7	460.9	-2.2	+12.2*

Note. \* indicates statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

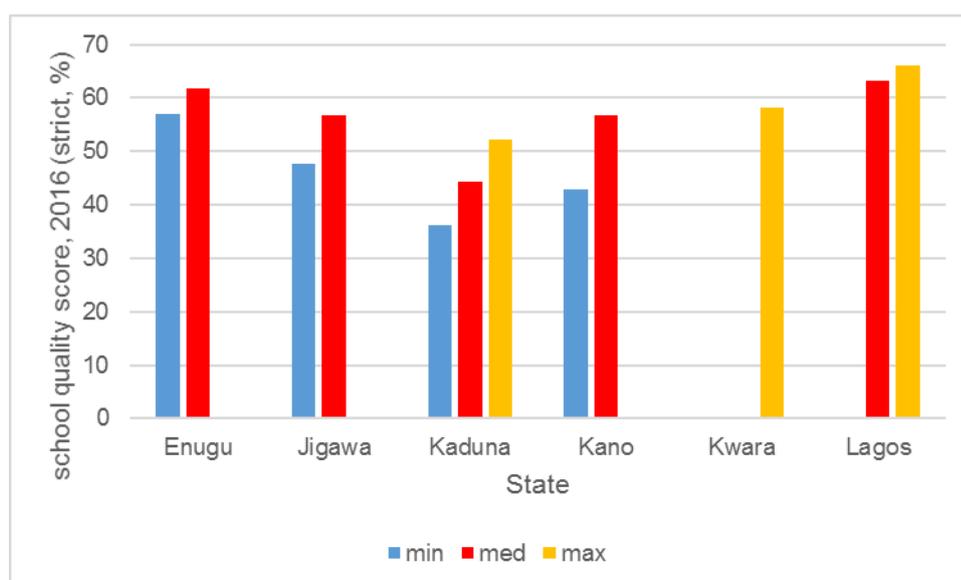
**Table 4 Key indicators in 2016, by ESSPIN intervention groups**

	Min (1 year)	Med (2-3 years)	Max (4-5 years)	Estimated effect of 1 year of full intervention
Effective head teacher (%)	14.1	26.0	24.2	5.2*
School development planning (%)	11.1	36.3	28.3	8.7*
Inclusive (%)	7.3	17.4	23.4	2.3
Functioning SBMC (%)	27.4	72.5	87.4	18.7*
Good quality school (%)	9.1	34.6	36.4	10.5*
Good quality school (new measure, %)	1.1	12.6	17	3.1*

Note. \* indicates statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

50. The difference between intervention groups is consistent across the states, and is most pronounced in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano (**Error! Reference source not found. 8**).

**Figure 8 Key indicators in 2016, by ESSPIN intervention groups**



### Any Difference in Children's learning?

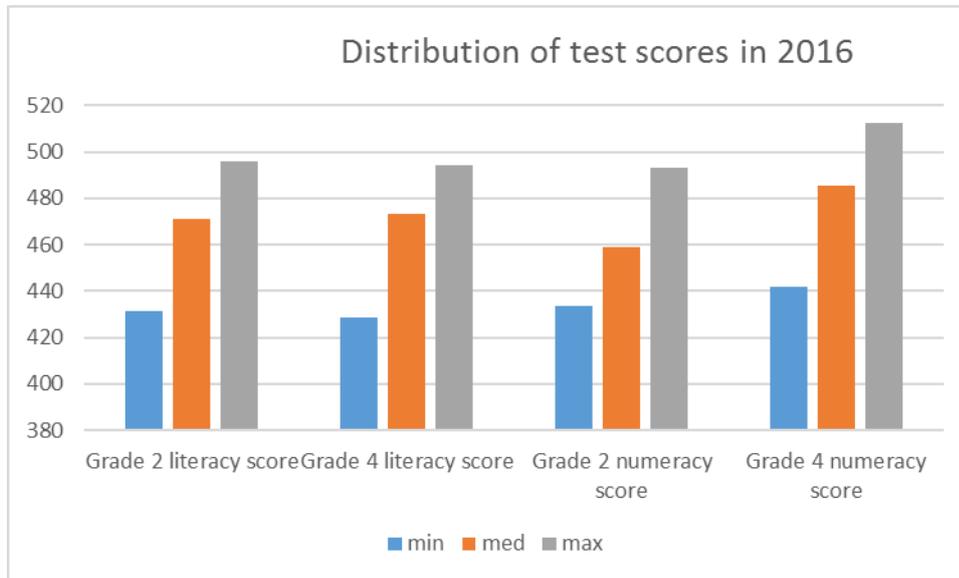
51. Notwithstanding the mixed performance already alluded to above (Figures 6 and 7), the 2016 Composite Survey concluded that ESSPIN intervention is associated with higher scores, even controlling for the state that the school is in, learners' socioeconomic status, and pre-existing school facilities.

52. In the CS2 report, Cameron et al (2015) observed that although test scores were generally worsening over time, there was some evidence of a less severe deterioration in schools that had received ESSPIN intervention compared to control schools. Indeed, evidence from CS2

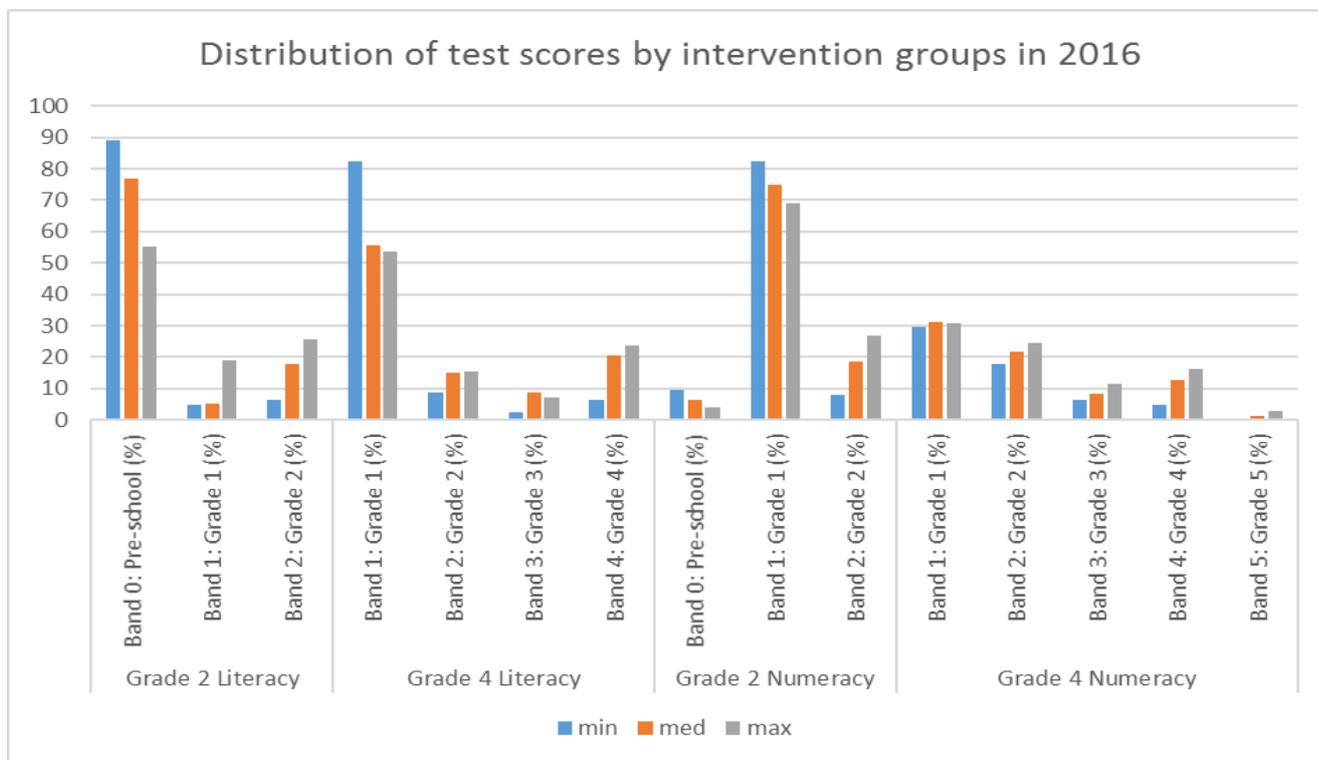
also indicated that poor children in SIP schools were significantly more likely to grasp the basic English literacy and numeracy skills than similar children in non-SIP schools.

53. However, in CS3 there are no control schools as all schools have been covered in all the states by the time of the survey. So the matter becomes how long a school has participated in SIP. To ascertain that, the survey categorised schools into three groups based on how long they have participated in SIP. Schools with the most years of participation in SIP are grouped in the maximum category, those with more years as medium, while those with the least years fall in the minimum category. The report concluded: “Learning outcomes appeared to be better for learners whose schools have received more ESSPIN intervention. For all four tests, the estimated effect of a year of full intervention is positive, but it is only statistically significant for the literacy tests. The estimated effect is modest in magnitude: it is in the range of 0.04 to 0.12 standard deviations. In schools with more ESSPIN intervention, there appear to be fewer learners in the lowest achievement bands and more learners in the middle achievement bands” (Cameron et al, p. 52). Figures 9 and 10 below clearly show the difference more years of ESSPIN makes in learning outcomes.

**Figure 9 Distribution of test scores in 2016**



**Figure 10 Distribution of test scores by intervention groups in 2016**



## Conclusion

54. In sum, the reality of the time lag between inputs and learning outcomes must be considered. The difficulty of assessing how long it takes for educational inputs and policy reforms to translate into learning outcomes is widely acknowledged. A 2013 HEART report for DFID observed, after a review of the literature, that “attributing changes in results to system-wide reforms can be complex where there are many different programmes and elements affecting outcomes”<sup>1</sup>. This is certainly the situation in Nigeria where no empirical evidence existed on the correlation between large scale programme inputs and learning outcomes prior to ESSPIN’s first Composite Survey in 2012. The 2014 and 2016 surveys indicated that learning outcomes were in general decline across the states, although schools with a high degree of ESSPIN exposure were still performing better than low exposure schools. DFID and ESSPIN are increasingly under pressure to show improved learning outcomes attributable to the SIP. This is challenging given 1) the lack of definitive evidence of

<sup>1</sup> HEART Helpdesk Report: Time taken for inputs into education or policy reform to affect learning outcomes, April 2013

the optimal time lag between inputs and results, 2) the relatively recent expansion of the SIP to 100% of primary schools in the six states, 3) the influx of additional children into SIP schools and the consequent strain on teachers who may be under-qualified, new to the SIP, and receiving insufficient training support, as well as 4) the expectation that these additional children are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds with many suffering the effects of malnutrition and others with special needs, thereby lowering average class attainment at least temporarily.

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