



# ASSESSMENT OF HISTORICAL LITERACY AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILORIN SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KWARA STATE

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## Abstract

This study assessed historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. In this study, in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on gender was examined. This study made use of descriptive survey method. The population for this study were all senior secondary school history students in Ilorin, Kwara State. 200 students were sampled for the study using simple random sampling technique. A researcher' self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection while the data collected for this study were analysed using the percentage and mean rating to answer the research questions while independent t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses postulated for this study at 0.05 level of significance. Findings from this study revealed that majority of the students performed below average in the historical literacy test; there was no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on gender; there was a significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents' socioeconomic status there was no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents' educational status. It was therefore recommended among others that efforts should be geared by all stakeholders in education towards improving historical literacy of the secondary school students. Historical literacy will not only give students idea of what transpired in the past but also make them to develop interest in reading and writing generally. Students should be made literate historically so as to able to think critically and have a good sense of judgement of events; government should re-introduce history as a subject into the secondary school curriculum because of its importance in secondary school education.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Literacy, History



## Introduction

Education, according to UNESCO (2006), is a human right and a public good. Nevertheless literacy remains a low priority for national government and the donor community. Worldwide, 774 million adults are illiterate and approximately 80 million children are out of school. A large number of those who enroll drop out before attaining literacy skills and some of those who complete primary education remain illiterate. According to UNESCO (2007), most young people who complete school without adequate literacy remain illiterate. They need basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy to have access to information about health, environment, education, the world of work and most importantly to learn how to learn throughout life. It is of note that these basic skills are also needed to enhance their livelihoods and practice healthy lifestyles. There is definite definition or well accepted definition but over 110 countries have used UNESCO's simple definition that "a person is literate, who can both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life."

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Generally, literacy includes reading and listening ability, numeracy, speaking ability, negotiating skills, critical thinking and judgement. Literacy is central to acquisition of skills and knowledge which affect productivity, governance and relationship; it is a crucial factor in economics, social, political and all spheres of development, thus a criterion in determining whether a nation is to be categorized as developed or not (Akpan, 2005). Literacy is a prerequisite for most forms of learning or skills.

Literacy skills are so important in everyday life. Literacy skills are needed to achieve high or adequate literacy for better understanding of information supplied through various means like on-line information, instructional information.

The traditional definition of literacy is the ability to read and write, listen and speak and enumerate. However, in the modern context literacy involves the ability to use and communicate in a diverse range of technologies. In general terms, literacy is a condition whereby one can successfully function at certain levels in a society where literacy plays a role in providing access to power. Essien (2005) maintained that literacy is concerned with the ability to read and write in a language. A literate person is, therefore, someone who is able to read and write in a language or languages. Thus, the standards for what level constitutes 'literacy' differ from society to society. Literacy has also been expanded to include skills in computer, basic numeracy, sound, still and moving images and graphical elements in digital based communication.

Also, it is reported that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTT) and the International Reading Association (2008) have added "visually representing" to the list of communicative competences that constitute literacy. The condition whether one has achieved a certain degree of literacy differs and is dependent on who is defining the standard and why. Functional literacy achieved through basic education, is the key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainable developmental targets. Functional literacy is

an intellectual equipment for an individual to enable him or her not only literate, but also perform other tasks that are of benefit to him/or her and to the society in which he or she lives (Asiedu&Oyedeki, 1985). It enables people to use their acquired knowledge to promote activities for economic gains or academic performance or gains. It is in the light of the importance of functional literacy to the individual and societal emancipation that the teaching of it in a multilingual environment like, Nigeria attracts a lot of attention (Etor, 2002).

According to Sarumi (2005), historical literacy refers to levels of historical content knowledge, that is, an accumulation of facts about past events. This argument can be connected to historical knowledge as a form of historical literacy. A historically literate person must be able to think historically. Historical literacy is of great educational value. As our historical reading widens and our judgment of events matures, we find fine achievements, sad mistakes and much humdrum endurance everywhere in the human record, and we come to see the histories of different peoples, with their contacts of peace and war, their currents of mutual influence and reaction, their parallels and affiliations and their similarities and contrasts.

History is a subject that studies past human actions, the motives that prompted those actions and their effects on past and present generations. It is a special type of subject, and its utility must be measured in ways other than those applied to subjects such as science, economics, business management, accounting or information communication technology. The deeper values or uses of history in the school curriculum are the

promotion of patriotism, development of reasoning ability, inculcation of moral values, development of imaginative ability, and the development of tolerance (Oppong&Cobbold, 2010).

Chang'ach (2011) opined that history is a panorama of character in action in every conceivable situation, because it widens indefinitely the circle of our acquaintances, provides abundant material for the analysis of motives and gives opportunity for cultivating restraint, tolerance and charity in the judgment of unpleasant ones. The main objectives of teaching history and government are: first, to demonstrate an understanding of how people and events of the past has influenced the ways in which people live and behave; second, to appreciate the need for an importance of mutual responsibility; and third, to develop a sense of patriotism and national pride (Chang'ach, 2011). As Dwarko (2007) puts it, history helps nations to understand the positions they belong and the hopes of the future based on the past. The cultural identity of nations is thus inherent in the history of every nation. It provides the directions for the nation since it tells where the people are coming from. This understanding can be the platform for decisions about political inclinations and for future actions of a more general nature. At the same time, school history has a powerful capacity to deal with issues of national identity which are not necessarily examined in other disciplines in quite such detail. Thus, everything about the nation is informed by history.

Despite its intrinsic importance, emerging developments indicate that history is at the junction of

jeopardy. There appears to be a waning of students' interest in the subject. The reasons for the waning interest of students in history appear to emanate from perceptions which students, parents and the general public have about the nature of the subject and its importance

Also, another reason for the decreasing student interest in history is the perception that the subject offers very little opportunities for employment, especially when compared to the so-called utilitarian, job-oriented, practical subjects or disciplines such as business management, accounting, agriculture and engineering, among others. Dwarko (2007) indicates that some parents hold such a perception to the extent that they threaten to stop sponsoring their children's education if they choose history from the senior high school and pursued it in the university. And for many people, the only job destination of the history graduate is the classroom. Such people's understanding of the wider contribution of history to their future lives is disappointingly uninformed.

However, Dwarko (2007) argued that history indeed can and does prepare students for the job market. The list of job opportunities for the history graduate is inexhaustible. It includes teaching and researching in history in public and private institutions; working as human relations officials in local and international organizations; managing information and cultural resources in archives, libraries, museums, national cultural centres and tourist centres; and working as research officers in law firms. The history graduate can

also work, like any other graduate, in the civil service, foreign services and security services. Shemilt (2000) noted that constructivist research into students' historical thinking suggests that students perceive the learning of history to be the presentation of a uniform picture of the past.

This study, therefore, examined the place of history in the school curriculum against the background of students' waning interest in the subject. Specifically, the study would assess historical literacy among senior secondary school students with a view of making a call for curriculum and pedagogical renewal of the subject in secondary school.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to assess historical literacy among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area of Kwara State. Specifically, the study:

- (1) examined the historical literacy level among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area.
- (2) determined the differences in the historical literacy level among senior secondary school students based on gender, family socioeconomic status and parents' educational status.

## **Research Questions**

- (1) What is the level of historical literacy among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area?

- (2) Is there any difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on gender?
- (3) Is there any difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on family socio economic status?
- (4) Is there any difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on parents' educational status?

## Research Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on gender.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on parents' socio-economic status.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on parents' educational status.

## Literature Review

The importance of history has been established by literature regardless of its criticism in contemporary times. According to Ajayi (1990) and Omolewa (1995), the clamour by individualized world such as Britain and America to make use of history at a length is because it is pertinent that people understand their past so they can map out effective strategies for future efforts. In

essence, people need to allow the lessons of the past to guide them to avoid past mistakes so that the future of mankind can be bright. Corroborating this view, (Aderinoye, 2004) submitted that there is nothing new under the sun, as most of the problems of the past are the ones recurrent in the present, hence the need to use the tool of the past to solve the current educational problems. In a similar vein, Verner (1964) had posited that adult educators wishing to build on a substantial foundation, will need to capitalize on gains of the past as to avoid past mistakes.

Prior to independence in 1960, Nigeria had a history of dominance of Quranic schools in the North and Missionary schools in the south. All of these promoted mostly religious literacy. Thus the intervention of the Islamic clerics exposed the Northern part of the country to Arabic literacy. With the advent of Christian missionaries later came western education, through which they exposed the whole of southern Nigeria and part of the inland region to literacy (Aderinoye, 2002).

At the end of the Second World War in 1945, there was an accelerated demand for literacy education as the colonial government realized the need for mass education of Nigerians if their programmes were to succeed. Accordingly, in 1946, a veteran soldier, Major A.J. Carpenter who had experience in Literacy education in the army, was appointed the first mass education officer for Nigeria. With the vision of making majority of the people literate, a ten-year mass literacy campaign, the first in the country, was launched the same year 1946 for a limited period of three years to

start with, and further two years for a mop-up operation, followed by another five years of post-literacy. In spite of some careful planning and collaborations of individuals and NGOs, the campaign failed due to lack of colonial administration's commitment to literacy for all, the attitude of which frustrated some officers out of literacy sector (Aderinoye, 2002).

The introduction of Free Primary Education scheme by both the Western Regional and Eastern Regional Governments in 1955 and 1956 respectively served as a greater booster to literacy efforts, though such schemes were short-lived due to heavy financial involvement and other forces which those regional governments could not content with. Hence, between 1952 and 1960 the regional governments embarked on policies aimed at developing the education sector. While the Western and Eastern regional governments provided Universal Primary Education (UPE), the Northern Regional Government opted for free primary and Literacy in its War Against Ignorance. This set the tone for Literacy development in the country during the first two decades of post-independence Nigeria

It was not until 1974 – 1984 period that the Nigerian government embarked on a new campaign for literacy promotion when Chief A.Y. Eke was the Minister for Education. Unfortunately, this effort was hampered, according to Sarumi (2005) by lack of fund, poor recruitment of instructors, inadequate literacy training, and lack of knowledge about the essence of literacy, among other reasons. However, the fact remains that it was the enthusiasm of Nigerian government for mass literacy that informed

entrenchment of adult education in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977. The implementation Committee for the NPE recommended in 1978 that the first task of the National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC) was to float a mass literacy campaign (Blueprint, 1978/79), while the Nigerian Constitution of 1979 provided that government would strive to eradicate illiteracy, hence the efforts of the Federal government in providing free, compulsory and Universal Primary Education (UPE), free secondary education, and free Literacy programme in 1976.

Literacy efforts in Nigeria received a significant boost when UNESCO supported the establishment of an Literacy Institute in 1963 in Ibadan to train professional adult educators. Then in 1982, the Civilian Government launched a 10-year National Mass Literacy Campaign. In order to achieve the goals of this 10-year campaign, the Federal Government directed each of the states to establish an Agency for Mass Education.

The year 1987 marked another milestone when the Federal Government directed that all states of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) should establish Adult and Non-Formal Education Agencies to executive literacy education. It is on record that Kano State was the first to comply in 1980. With such agencies prosecuting literacy in the states and local governments, the Federal (Military) Government went ahead to promulgate the National Primary Education Commission (1993) to take care of basic literacy in the formal education system; the Nomadic Education Commission (1989) to the take care of basic education of children of nomads and migrants;

and the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NCMANE) on June 25th, 1990 by Decree No. 17 of that year and inaugurated in 1991 to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria. Still to showcase its determination to eradicate illiteracy in the country, Nigeria in 1990 joined a broad alliance of Governments, United Nations, donor agencies, and NGOs that met in Jomtien, Thailand to launch the global challenge of education for ALL by the year 2000, and was signatory to the Jomtien Declaration. Also the adoption of the “Each-one-teach-one” or “fund the teaching of one” approach enunciated by the then Minister of Education, Professor Babs Fafunwa was further indication that Nigeria was committed to the success of mass literacy education.

A great wind of change came in 1990; when the Federal Military Government established the National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-formal Education to coordinate adult and non-formal education programmes in the country. With the launching of UBE programme in 2000 literacy opportunity is expected to be provided for all. The fact remains that the National Mass Literacy Campaign was re-launched on 8th September, 1992 by the Babangida administration which declared 1990-2000 another literacy decade, through the introduction of Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reforms (MAMSER), the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and similar organizations. Although elaborate preparations were made, including external assistance from donor agencies particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), success was

limited. Sarumi (2005) pinpointed political crisis, frequent changes in government, lack of continuity in personnel and lack of commitment by the end users of literacy as key factors that militated against the success of 1990-2000 mass literacy period. At this junction, the question that comes to mind is that, what are the fruits of these efforts? On this note, the status of literacy in Nigeria was examined.

Given a number of previous studies conducted on literacy, for example, Tenibiaje (2014) examined the level of communication skills, literacy and health literacy of inmates in Nigerian Prisons. Findings from the data analysed revealed that there is inadequate health condition in the prisons, and health literacy of inmates is inadequate. Literacy levels of inmates are very low. Poor health literacy is common among elderly inmates.

Ihejirika (2013) examined past government efforts in promoting mass literacy in the country with a view to drawing out implications and lessons from adult education historical research that could guide future literacy attempts. This study identified ineffective education policies, lack of political and national wills, financial inadequacy, poor planning and implementation strategies, lack of reliable baseline data, and lack of commitment on the part of leaders, among others, as prime causes of the failures. As a way out of the impasse, the study calls for revision of the country’s basic education Act of 2004; enforcement of reasonable acts and policies backed with fund, determined political will and decisive action by the government, effective programme planning and execution, mobilization of National Youth Corps members, training and retraining

of literacy facilitators, and popular participation of Nigerians in order to enable future literacy efforts yield desired results.

Inko-Tariah (2014) assessed both Literacy and Numeracy levels of Secondary School students in Rivers State of Nigeria. Results revealed that students performed better in the Literacy test than the Numeracy test. Female students outperformed the male students in Literacy test while the reverse was the case in the Numeracy test. Both gender and school location made significant differences on students' levels of Literacy and Numeracy. However, none of these studies had focused on historical literacy, especially in Ilorin South Nigeria. This created a gap in the body which the present study attempted to fill by assessing the historical literacy among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South, Nigeria.

## Methodology

This study was a descriptive survey type. The population for this study comprised all senior secondary school students in Kwara State. The target population consisted of public secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area. A total 200 respondents were sampled using simple random sampling technique. This method allowed for equal chance of being selected in the sample. The instrument for this study was an achievement test titled "Students' Achievement Test on Historical Literacy (SATHL)." The instrument had two sections: Section A contained information on the personal background of the respondents such as: gender, age, class, parents' socioeconomic and educational status, etc. Section B consisted of 20 multiple-choice

test items on historical literacy which was developed and based on past questions and other relevant materials consulted.

For the purpose of validation, the instrument was given to other experts in the Department for vetting. All the comments and observations that were made these experts were effected to ensure the test items measure what they are designed for. The test was administered on 30 respondents who were not part of the final respondents using test retest method. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained and the instrument was adjudged reliable. Descriptive and inferential data analysis techniques such as frequency count, percentages, t-test and ANOVA were employed for data analysis. Specifically, research questions one was answered using frequency counts and percentages, while hypothesis one was tested using t-test. However, hypotheses 2-3 were tested using ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance.

## Data Analysis and Results

Equal (100) number of male and female students constituted the respondents for this study. Also, majority of the respondents' parent socioeconomic status 123 (61.5%) is between N30,000 - N50,000. Similarly, majority of the respondents' parents 76 (38.5%) had B.Sc/B.Ed/B.Sc (Ed.) educational qualification. Majority of the respondents sampled in this study 113 (56.5%) are 14 years and above.

## Answering of Research Question

**Question:** *What is the level of historical literacy among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area?*



In order to determine the level historical literacy among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Government Area, students' performance in historical literacy test was classified into high, low and average.

**Table 1:** Level of Historical Literacy among Senior Secondary Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area

Historical Literacy Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	55	27.5
Average	34	17.0
Low	111	55.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The result above indicates that majority of the respondents have low level of historical literacy 111 (55.5%) in secondary school. This implies that students' performance in historical literacy test is very low in secondary schools.

**Hypotheses Testing**

The hypotheses generated in this study were tested using t-test and ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance.

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on gender.

**Table 3:** Summary of t-test of the Difference in Historical Literacy of Students based on Gender

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	Sig.	Remark
Male	100	30.49	5.90	198	0.503	0.100	Not Rejected
Female	100	31.76	3.78				

\*Significant at P>0.05

The result above shows that the calculated significant value of 0.100  $t - cal_{(df=198)} = 0.503$  is

greater than the chosen 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis one is not rejected. Thus, there is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on gender. This implies that historical literacy of male and female students are the same in Ilorin South Local Government Area.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on parents' socio-economic status.

**Table 4a:** ANOVA Summary of the Difference in the Historical Literacy of Students based on Parents' Socioeconomic Status

Groups	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	13853.01	2	6926.50	27.29	0.00	Rejected
Within Groups	50005.30	197	253.83			
Total	53858.31	199				

p<0.05

As shown in Table 4a, the F-value 27.29 was obtained with a p-value 0.00 when computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.00 obtained is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents' socioeconomic status.

Sequel to the establishment of a significant difference between the means, further test was carried out on the various combinations of means to find out



where the difference occurred. The test was conducted using Duncan’s Post Hoc procedure at 0.05 alpha level. The Post Hoc is a statistical procedure used to determine which of the multiple groups actually accounted for the difference.

**Table 4b:** Duncan’s Post Hoc Pair-wise Comparisons Showing the Difference in the Historical Literacy of Students based on Parents’ Socioeconomic Status

Respondents	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
<N30,000	52	27.68	
>N50,000	25	27.73	
N30,000- N50,000	123		31.81
Sig.		.94	1.00

Table 4b reveals that the difference noted in Table 4a was contributed by parents with the higher mean score 31.81. Thus, students whose parents have better socioeconomic status perform better in historical literacy test than others whose socioeconomic status mean scores are 27.73 and 27.68 respectively.

**Ho<sub>3</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area based on parents’ educational status.*

**Table 5:** ANOVA Summary of the Difference in the Historical Literacy of Students based on Parents’ Educational Status

Groups	Sum of Squares	d f	Mean Square	F	Si g.	Remark
Between Groups	230.34	4	57.59	0.196	.09	Not Rejected
Within Groups	57321.03	195	293.95			

Total	57551.37	199				
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p>0.05

As shown in Table 5, the p-value 0.09 obtained is greater than 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.09 obtained was greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null is not rejected or accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents’ educational status. That is, students regardless of their parents’ educational status have the same knowledge in history.

### Discussion

The result of research question one showed that majority of the respondents performed below in historical literacy test. This means that the senior secondary school students are not vast in historical literacy. This finding is in line with Oluputunde (2012) reports that about 51% of children of age 15 years and above are illiterate. The issue of literacy level goes beyond historical literacy but it is all encompassing, and it shows the extent to which literacy level of students has declined generally.

The outcome of hypothesis one revealed that there was no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on gender. This implies that historical literacy of male and female students are the same in Ilorin South Local Government Area. This result is against UNESCO (2013) reports who observed that female children have low literacy compare to their male counterparts. This

outcome may be true because of equal number of male and female students sampled in this study.

The study also revealed that there was a significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents' socioeconomic status. This indicates that students from parents with better socioeconomic status did better in historical literacy. This result lends credence to the assertion of Lankshear and Knobel (2006) who opined that the goal of historical literacy is to enable students to read history texts critically, to write thoughtfully, and to engage in meaningful discussions about the past. Parents with good source of income will stand the better chance of purchasing historical texts for their which will make them historically literate.

The finding of hypothesis three showed that there was no significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents' educational status. That is, students regardless of their parents' educational status have the same knowledge in history. This result is consistent with the assertion of Omolewa (2006) who affirmed that for a nation to overcome poverty and illiteracy, it must invest in education.

## Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it could be concluded that senior secondary school students have low level of historical literacy. There was a significant difference in the historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on parents' socioeconomic status. However, there was no significant difference in the

historical literacy of senior secondary school students based on gender and parents' educational status.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that efforts should be geared by all stakeholders in education towards improving historical literacy of the secondary school students. Historical literacy will not only give students idea of what transpired in the past but also make them to develop interest in reading and writing generally. Students should be made literate historically so as to able to think critically and have a good sense of judgement of events.

Also, government should re-introduce history as a subject into the secondary school curriculum because of its importance in secondary school education. History teaches moral, values and makes students to be patriotic and useful citizens. Our society is morally bankrupt probably because the young generation does not have idea of the ways of life of people in the past. Teaching history in secondary school will restore the virtues of good character and sound moral values in the students, thereby building a better society for the country.

Parents should also make their children and wards historically literate by teaching and telling them past events in order to be able to project into the future. They should, regardless of their educational and socioeconomic status, buy historical materials for their children to read and encourage them to relate it with the present. This will help to improve their reading habit and develop their literacy skills.

Finally, historical literacy should be taught in schools so as to reduce poverty rate, ignorance and illiteracy in our society. Teaching of historical literacy will go a long way in reducing high rate of illiteracy, and increasing the awareness of people about happenings in their society.

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