

## **Assessment of Adaptive Functioning Skills of Children Living in Foster Care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State**

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### **Abstract**

*Adaptive functioning develops throughout early childhood, and its inadequacy implies that the child has developmental, emotional, or disability problems. This study therefore, assessed the adaptive functioning skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State. The study raised three research questions and a descriptive survey research design was adopted. A purposive sampling procedure was used to select twenty-five (25) children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State. The instrument for the study was a researcher designed rating scale titled ‘‘Adaptive Functioning Skills of Children Living in foster care rating scale’’. The face and content validity of the instrument was validated by experts from the Department of Adult and Primary Education. The Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Data analysis involved using Mean and standard deviation to analyze all the research questions. The findings of the study discovered that children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area generally possess well-developed adaptive functioning skills. It was however recommended among others that foster care management should teach social interaction skills through role-playing and group activities to enhance communication, empathy, and relationship-building.*

**Keywords:** Adaptive functioning skills, conceptual skills, social skills, practical skills, foster care

### **Introduction**

Generally, children all over the world adapt with the environment they found themselves in one way or the other. This adaptation differs in children due to some background factors such as culture, religion, socio-economic status, age, gender among others. A child is a minor who has not matured and is below the age of eighteen (18) years. Circumstances such as death of biological

parents, poverty, migration, child abuse, neglect, broken homes may warrant a child to live in foster care which may likely make or mar the adaptive functioning of such child. An adaptive functioning skill of children encompasses skills which the children learn all through their life and put forward to meet the demands and expectations of their environment and society at large. Adaptive functioning develops throughout early childhood, and its inadequacy implies that the child has developmental, emotional, or disability problems. Little is known about the adaptive functioning of children living in foster care.

It has been established in the literature that more than 250 million children who are below the age of five (5) in developing countries are not fulfilling their developmental potential (Black, et al. 2017). Adaptive functioning skill is a fundamental part of developmental evaluation and has been used in determining the functional potential of children. It can further be defined as behaviours or skills learnt and are performed to meet society's expectation such as the home, school, work, and other community settings (Schalock et al., 2010). Adaptive functioning skills are indexed on chronological age because the society has different expectations of all the members of the community as they age. It increases with chronological age and the onset of various social roles and responsibilities such as going to school, participating in sporting activities, maintaining friendship, dating, independence/interdependence, financial responsibilities, following rules, social responsibilities, employment, raising children.

Adaptive functioning is a broad construct that encompasses practical skills such as self-care, toileting, cooking, cleaning, caring for one's home, money concepts, and work skills; social skills such as interpersonal skills, managing one's emotions and conceptual skills which includes functional academics, communication skills, concept of time, money management, and self-direction (American Psychiatric Association, 2013 and Tassé et al., 2012). Important social skills include greeting others, assisting classmates, begin discussions, sharing things with other people, giving complements, seeking assistance when needed, having sense of humour, knowing current slang words and obeying sports/games and classroom rules. Among the undesirable social skills include not reacting to peers social relations; misunderstanding the approach skills of peers, and entering games of peers' activities uninvited. A significant source of information about a person's skills and functional abilities can be obtained from direct observations of the person or via interviews with people (foster parent or caregiver) who have lived with, worked with, or had the

opportunity to observe the person on a regular basis and seen how they function at home, school, work, and/or play.

The foster care is designed to remodel unfavourable family and environmental situations which can probably hamper with child development. This arrangement provides short and long term out of home placement to children whose parents are considered unable to take adequate care of their wards. The effectiveness of foster care as an intervention however, is the subject of controversy. Throughout the current foster care literature, taking children away from their biological parent and putting them out of domicile care has been linked with negative developmental consequences which may probably put children at risk for psychological, emotional, behavioural, academic, and developmental problems.

Foster care is considered caring environments that enable the children in foster care to thrive despite past adverse experiences (Comas-Diaz et al., 2012). Most of the children living with foster parents' have been the victims of repeated abuse and prolonged neglect and have not experienced a nurturing, stable environment during the early years of life. Such experiences are critical in the short and long term development of a child's brain and the ability to subsequently participate fully in society. Children in foster care experiences behavioural problems, maltreatments, emotional and interactive issues that may possibly lead to poor achievements, adaptive functioning difficulties and engaging in high-risk behaviours (Pecora, 2012). They might further face challenges such as separation from family, disruption in friendships and school associates, as well as shame of being in foster care which can affect their psychological wellbeing (Leslie et al., 2005).

Over the time, findings have showed that most of the children living in foster care perform woefully academically which could as a result affect their future academic achievement in the later years (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). When children in foster care are compared with other children, children in care averagely have lower academic achievement, low school attendance and high rates of grade retention literacy and numeracy (Jackson, 2007). Workers in the society which includes caregivers and social workers are putting in their best to assist children in foster care but a lack of communication has rendered the effort futile (Johnson, 2020; Watson –Davis, 2020). A research conducted by Watson-Davis (2010) was a quantitative study; he collected data on 151 elementary teachers through a survey as regards their experiences with children in foster care in the classroom. Most teachers revealed that not enough communication existed, but some teachers had received

information regarding children in foster care in their classes. He also confirmed that helping children in foster care to academically succeed has been a demanding assignment for teachers, owing to issues such as social-emotional behaviours, lack of attention and behavioural problems. In one study, about 30% of foster alumni reported 10 or more school changes from basic through college (Van Doore, 2016). Prior to their foster care placement, some children have missed many days or even months of school, for a number of reasons which ranges from eviction of the biological family, becoming homeless, moving from one home to another, lack of clean clothes to wear. Adapting to a new syllabus and school customs may poses challenges to any child. Children in foster care, with limited resources to draw on, may stop attending school regularly, which increases their risk of academic failure.

As adaptive functioning develops in children, their involvement in personal care and daily routines increases. Adaptive functioning enables children to adjust to new environments or situations, such as entering a foster family, and engage in familiar or desirable activities with minimal prompting (Sparrow, Cicchetti, & Saulnier, 2016). This procedure is significant for their general growth and well-being. Studies have revealed that parents often keep their wards in foster care in order to maintain family and friendship ties without monetary benefits. However, in many cases, parents and caregivers encourage children to remain in foster care with the hope of better opportunities and life chances. Unfortunately, this is often done without considering the children's adaptive functioning, health, emotional, and psychological stability (Greeson et al., 2015; Berrick, 2019).

Owing to unfavourable care experiences in childhood, foster children are exposed to shortfall in several developmental areas such as adaptive functioning and intellectual functioning (Oswald, Heil, & Goldbeck, 2010). Countless of these children have been abused, battered and neglected. Additionally, children that are placed in foster care have been reported to have inferior health status right from birth than population-based controls (Kalland, Sinkkonen, Gissler, Merilainen, & Siimes, 2006), and may for that reason struggle with developmental issues later in life. Problems among foster children have been recognized as early as in childhood, and the need for interventions has been recommended (Leslie, Gordon, Ganger, & Gist, 2002; Leslie et al., 2005). There is a study of on-going assessments for early developmental delays in foster children which revealed that about 57% of children had possible developmental delays (Bruhn, Duval, & Louderman, 2008).

The children living in foster care experience deficit in life skills and preparation to grow to be self-sufficient in their existence. Deficit in life skills can result to pitiable educational outcome for children with a record of foster care (Courtney et al., 2004). Some other challenges encountered by children in foster care include: shame, absence of permanence, stigma, resistance to fostering as a result of cultural belief about child rearing, repeated changes in placement often mean changes in neighbourhoods and schools, which add to difficulty in upholding relationships and academic success. According to Springer (2023), early placement in foster care, ideally before significant emotional damage occurs, can lead to better social outcomes. However, even with early involvement, many foster children continue to experience social skill deficits compared to their peers. There is an urgent need to conduct a research on adaptive functioning of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State. Most of the studies conducted so far have focused on adaptive functioning in children having other health related disorders. Very limited researches were found to assess adaptive functioning of children living in foster care. Another gap in the literature is that no study of this nature was done in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study.

1. What is the level of conceptual skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State?
2. To what extent are the children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State, able to accomplish social skills?
3. What is the level of practical skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State?

### **Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. Daramola (2006) defined descriptive research as the systematic attempt to describe the characteristics of a given population or areas of interests factually. The population for this study comprises of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State. To sample the needed respondents, a purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty-five (25) children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State so that the researcher can focus on obtaining high-quality, detailed, and relevant data. This sampling technique enables the researcher to deliberately select participants who possess specific characteristics and experiences. The instrument for the study was a researcher designed rating scale

titled “Adaptive Functioning Skills of Children Living in foster care rating scale which comprises of four sections. To ensure face and content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts from the Department of Adult and Primary Education and the Department of Social Sciences Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. These experts evaluated whether the instrument accurately measured the intended constructs. Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method; the instrument was administered twice, with an interval of two weeks after which the two ratings were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.75. This indicates an acceptable level of internal consistency for the instrument. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze all the research questions. All the ethical guidelines were considered in the course of the study. Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher personally sought the consent and approval of the foster parents’ and assured them of the confidentiality of all the information provided.

### Answering Research Questions

**Research Question One:** What is the level of conceptual skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State?

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing the conceptual skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State**

S/N	ITEM	X	SD	Decision
1.	Understands simple instructions such as “open the door”, “get your bag”, and “show me your pencil”	4.44	.650	Accepted
2.	Sits down when signalled to do so	4.00	.816	Accepted
3.	Tells the names of familiar people	4.56	.583	Accepted
4.	Uses pencil or crayon for drawing	4.44	.869	Accepted
5.	Recognizes all letters of alphabet	4.28	.842	Accepted
6.	Reads a few simple sight words.	3.80	.957	Accepted
7.	Adds numbers up to 100 ( 8+2, 7+3, 4+3, 2+5, 1+6 )	3.76	1.01	Accepted
8.	Asks questions to obtain information from others.	3.80	.866	Accepted
9.	Understands the difference between yesterday, today and tomorrow	4.16	1.10	Accepted
10.	Knows basic colours like purple, red, blue, green, orange, yellow.	4.32	.988	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>4.15</b>		

### Criterion Mean 3.0

The table provides the mean and standard deviation for various conceptual skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State. Each skill was rated on a scale, and all items were accepted, indicating a high level of conceptual functioning skills among these children. The grand mean score of 4.15, which is higher than the criterion mean of 3.0, indicates an overall high level

of conceptual functioning skills among the children in foster care. This implies that children living in foster care in this area generally possess well-developed conceptual skills.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent is the children living in foster care in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State are able to accomplish social skills?

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation showing the social skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State.**

S/N	ITEM	X	SD	Decision
1.	Imitates adult roles	4.16	.687	Accepted
2.	Comfort playmates in distress	3.80	.957	Accepted
3.	seek for assistance when needed	4.08	.812	Accepted
4.	Respects others' properties	4.04	.734	Accepted
5.	Uses social phrases appropriately (e.g., "please," "hello," "thank you.")	4.24	.830	Accepted
6.	Interacts without displaying negative physical or verbal behaviours.	3.84	1.06	Accepted
7.	Can accept criticisms and suggestions without becoming angry or annoyed	4.08	.953	Accepted
8.	Proposes solution in group conflicts (such as sticking to the rules of the game)	3.80	.957	Accepted
9.	States emotions about self: sad, happy, love, angry, hate	4.00	.763	Accepted
10.	Has more than one friend	4.64	.568	Accepted
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>4.06</b>		

**Criterion Mean 3.0**

The table presents the analysis of respondents' views on various social skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State. Each item was rated on a scale and all items (1-10) received positive ratings, indicating an overall high level of social functioning skills among the children in foster care. This suggests that children living in foster care in this area generally possess well-developed social skills. This conclusion is supported by the grand mean of 4.06, which is higher than the criterion mean of 3.0.

**Research Question Three:** What is the level of practical skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State?

**Table 3: Mean and standard deviation showing the practical skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State**

S/N	ITEM	X	SD	Decision
1.	Does small errands in familiar surroundings	4.48	.714	Accepted
2.	Cleaning the house, dusting, washing clothes	3.88	.927	Accepted
3.	Participates in organized games	3.96	.840	Accepted
4.	Uses pointed objects (knives, scissors, needles) safely	3.88	1.26	Accepted
5.	Putting things in right order at home	3.76	1.05	Accepted
6.	Cleaning the room	3.80	1.15	Accepted

7.	Can wipes and blow nose 70% of period when required with no reminders	4.20	.912	Accepted
8.	Washing hands before eating	4.16	1.10	Accepted
9.	Can buckles and unbuckles belt on dress, pants or shoes	4.04	.934	Accepted
10.	Hangs up cloths on hanger.	3.88	1.09	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>4.00</b>		

#### **Criterion Mean 3.0**

The table provides the mean and standard deviation for various practical skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North, Oyo State. Each skill was rated on a scale, and all items were accepted, indicating a high level of practical functioning skills among these children. The grand mean score of 4.00, which is higher than the criterion mean of 3.0, indicates an overall high level of practical functioning skills among the children in foster care. This suggests that children living in foster care in this area generally possess well-developed practical skills.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

The first finding of the study revealed the conceptual functioning skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area. The overall average score of 4.15, which is higher than the benchmark score of 3.0, indicates an overall high level of conceptual functioning skills among the children in foster care. This suggests that children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area generally possess well-developed conceptual skills. This finding negates the findings of Courtney & Dworsky, (2006) who revealed that most of the children living in foster care perform woefully academically which could as a result affect their future academic achievement in the later years. Jackson, (2007) also posited that when children in foster care are compared with other children, children in care averagely have lower academic achievement, low school attendance and high rates of grade retention literacy and numeracy.

Another finding of the study showed the social functioning skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area. It was revealed that each social skill was rated on a scale and all items (1-10) received positive ratings, indicating an overall high level of social functioning skills among the children in foster care. This suggests that children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area generally possess well-developed social skills. This conclusion is supported by the overall average score of 4.06, which is higher than the benchmark score of 3.0. This finding is in contrasts with Pecora's (2012) assertion that children in foster care confront maltreatment, emotional and relational challenges, leading to poor academic



performance, difficulties in adaptive functioning, and engagement in high-risk behaviours. Springer (2023) suggested that putting children in foster care early, ideally before significant emotional damage occurs, can improve social outcomes. However, despite early intervention, many foster children still struggle with social skill deficits compared to their peers.

Finally, finding of the study showed the practical functioning skills of children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area. It was revealed that each practical skill was rated on a scale, and all items were accepted, indicating a high level of practical functioning skills among these children. This is clear from the overall average score of 4.00, which is higher than the benchmark score of 3.0, indicates an overall high level of practical functioning skills among the children in foster care. This suggests that children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area generally possess well-developed practical skills. This finding contradicts the findings of Courtney et al., (2004) who found that children living in foster care experience deficit in life skills and preparation to grow to be self-sufficient in their existence. Deficit in life skills can result to pitiable educational outcome for children with a record of foster care. Some other challenges encountered by children in foster care include: shame, absence of permanence, stigma, resistance to fostering as a result of cultural belief about child rearing, repeated changes in placement often mean changes in neighbourhoods and schools, which add to difficulty in upholding relationships and academic success.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study discovered that children living in foster care in Ogbomoso North Local Government Area generally possess well-developed adaptive functioning skills. Adaptive functioning skill is a multifaceted construct encompassing communication, socialization, daily living, conceptual and emotional regulation skills. Each of these components plays a critical function in a child's ability to navigate their environment, achieve independence, and meet societal expectations. A comprehensive understanding of these components is essential for assessing and supporting the adaptive functioning skill of children, particularly those in vulnerable populations such as foster care. While these children face significant challenges, targeted interventions and supportive programs can mitigate some of these difficulties such as the quality of care, stability, access to educational resources which may consequently promote better conceptual, social and practical skills of these children. Further research is needed to explore the most efficient approach

for assisting the conceptual development of children in foster care and to ensure these interventions are accessible to all children who need them.

### Recommendations

1. Foster care management should teach social interaction skills through role-playing and group activities such as conflict resolution workshops, team building exercises so as to enhance communication, empathy, and relationship-building.
2. Incorporation of practical life skills training in daily routines, such as cooking, budgeting, and personal hygiene.
3. The foster care environment should be made conducive for children to learn and explore so as to help promote better conceptual skills.
4. Government should provide interventions and supportive programs by funding initiatives, collaborating with the Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which can help mitigate the challenges of foster children and promote better conceptual, social and practical skills.

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