

A B S T R A C T

With a view to tackling the reading problem which is rooted not only in the bidialectal language environment of Jamaica but also in certain inadequacies in the educational context, including an inadequate supply of reading texts and the cultural irrelevance of many of these readers, this study was designed firstly, to both clarify the meaning of 'reading interest' and to develop a schema for categorizing 'reading interest', and secondly, to investigate the following: whether there are grade level, sex and environmental differences in the reading interests of first and fourth grade children in Jamaican primary schools: whether fourth graders' reading interests are affected by different stimuli: what children's reasons are for their story preferences: the extent to which first and fourth grade reading texts reflect the differences in reading interests ascertained: and whether reading interests are influenced by reading texts.

Main findings are: that there are grade level, sex and environmental differences in reading interests: that some of the fourth graders' reading interests are affected by different stimuli: and that children's reasons for their story preferences range from their popular appeal and the fact that they reflect the realities of their experiences, to their moral and humorous content. An analysis of popular reading texts revealed that fourth grade texts to some extent reflected the differences in fourth graders' reading interests, but that those used in the first grade tended to under-represent first graders' reading interests to the extent of neglecting those of both urban and rural girls.

The findings also suggest the likelihood of reading texts influencing reading interests.

This study underscores both the need for teachers to be cognisant of grade level, sex and environmental differences in children's reading interests, and for writers to represent more fully the varied reading interests of first graders particularly in their textbooks. Researchers are also challenged to develop a reading scheme for fourth grade non - readers, embracing themes which more appropriately reflect their high interest areas.