

ABSTRACT

This research arose from a perceived need to explore reasons for the consistently poor results achieved by Jamaican students taking the University of Cambridge, GCE A'Level Geography examination. Data were collected from a sample of 155 Jamaican students on 5 dependent and 19 independent variables. Also, for comparative purposes, similar data were also collected from 470 English students. Further information was obtained from a survey of A'Level Geography teachers in Jamaica and England.

Research concerns were focussed upon the three areas of explanation, prediction and description. During the explanation stage, factors representing underlying dimensions were constructed and employed to build causal models using path analysis. The prediction stage concerned the generation of multiple regression equations to select independent variables which best predicted A'Level achievement. Also, discriminant analyses allowed selection of variables to discriminate between students passing and failing the examinations. The description stage involved collecting factual material in order to illuminate the analyses and facilitate comparisons between resources and practices in Jamaica and England.

The major findings of the research were as follows:

- The most important factor associated with achievement in Jamaica was school influence. Within this factor, the qualifications, experience and teaching style of staff were of importance, together with the amount of fieldwork undertaken. Problems associated with poor facilities, entry standards and the availability of books were also uncovered.
- Study orientation was the other major factor to emerge for Jamaica. Motivation was found to be particularly important, especially for the independent research paper (the Local Study).
- Cognitive measures including verbal and spatial ability were not associated with achievement in Jamaica.

- Family background was not related with achievement, although the educational environment of the home was associated with study habits.
- Jamaican students were disadvantaged in terms of school influence, cognitive and family background. Conversely, they had higher mean scores on all the study orientation variables.
- For England, the main factor associated with A'Level attainment was study orientation. Cognitive ability was also involved, and empirical evidence was produced to support an hypothesised relationship between spatial ability and practical Geography.