

A B S T R A C T

This study examines the perception that a significant sector of the Jamaican public presently evaluates and expresses views and opinions at an unsatisfactory level. The nature of this language weakness is described in detail, including its links to Jamaica's creole heritage.

As the problem was thought to extend to students, based on the examiners' comments for CXC English A, a sample of grade 10 students from six secondary institutions was tested to determine the level at which the students were functioning.

The findings showed that although mean scores were 51.6, 50.2 and 42.2 percent respectively of the total marks on each of the three sections of the criterion test, based on frequency counts, only 26%, 30% and 15% respectively of the sample could score 60% or over on the corresponding sections of the test. Sixty percent was regarded as a level below which normal functioning would be impaired.

There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls on the test. However, traditional high school students performed significantly better than students from other types of secondary institutions.

The variables identified as most relevant to performance are verbal ability, mental ability and socio-economic status, in that order.

The primary recommendations of the study were that parents and teachers should adopt a less authoritarian posture with their charges and actively foster the free but tactful expression of personal views. Deliberate efforts were to be made to provide practice in understanding complex concepts like 'prejudice' and the fine distinctions that are the result of differences in point of view.