

Abstract

This study assessed the extent to which some Jamaican 10th and 11th graders from urban high schools (four single-sex and two mixed schools) could comprehend three chemistry textbooks. There were 75 tenth graders (40 boys, 35 girls, aged 14-16 years and 72 eleventh graders (35 boys, 37 girls, aged 15-17 years). Fry's readability graph, the Cloze, comprehension and vocabulary tests were used for data collection. The results showed that textbooks A and B, had higher reading ages than those of the sampled students who were reading the textbooks mainly at the frustration and instructional levels. Only 11-13 of the sampled students were reading the Cloze passages of texts A and B at the independent level, whereas 66 students read text C independently. For all three textbooks, 60-80% of the students (a) comprehended the comprehension passages at the frustration level, and (b) scored less than 50 percent on the vocabulary tests. The poor performance of the sampled students implies that the textbooks were unsuitable for most of them; there was a fairly strong correlation between their vocabulary knowledge and comprehension ability ($r=0.60^{**}$); and the 11th graders, the girls and the students of professionals performed significantly better than the 10th graders, the boys and the students of nonprofessionals respectively.