

ABSTRACT

Factors in Achievement and Attrition in Spanish at Grade Nine in Jamaican High Schools

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Impetus for this research was provided by typically low levels of achievement in Spanish in Jamaican schools, and high student attrition rates preceding terminal examinations.

Characterised by a dichotomous design, the study sought, at one level, to identify the relationship of selected variables to achievement in Spanish and, at the other, to ascertain important influences on attrition in the study of Spanish.

Investigated at Level 1 were (i) the total sample of 337 grade nine high school students of Spanish and (ii) sub-samples created by sex and school location and, following entry to grade 10, by drop-out and persistence. Level 2 studied the group of 182 dropouts and 47 teachers of Spanish.

Major findings were as follows:

LEVEL 1

- i) Multiple Regression analyses identified self-concept of ability followed by convergent thinking ability as main predictors of Spanish achievement. Total variance accounted for in the composite criterion was 45.1%.

- ii) Student's 't' revealed highly significant sex differences favouring boys on cognitive, environmental and achievement variables, and girls on affective and instructional ones.
- iii) ANOVA yielded distinct patterns of behaviour for school location, each subgroup emerging strongest on a separate dimension: small town, instructional; large town, affective and personality; and metropolitan, environmental and cognitive.
- iv) Student's 't' consistently favoured persisters over non-persisters on achievement, and on all dimensions of independent variables excluding the environmental dimension.

LEVEL 2

- i) Main contributors to attrition appeared to be low achievement and learning difficulty. Students' emerging feelings between grades consistently declined relative to achievement.
- ii) Significant sex differences revealed female disenchantment with Spanish, but a higher level of female commitment to Spanish.
- iii) School location differences signaled the greatest tendency among the metropolitan sample, and the least among the large-town group towards defection from Spanish.

Major findings dictated a model of Spanish teaching designed to take into account students' sensitivity to achievement.