

## **Abstract**

Grounded in the concerns about Spanish achievement, this study investigated the relationship between various home, school and individual student factors and Spanish achievement. The sample consisted of 368 students drawn from the population of grades seven and nine secondary high school students of Spanish in Jamaica. Subjects were chosen from rural and urban schools, both traditional and upgraded.

Students responded to questionnaires assessing home background, parental involvement in students' school work, as well as affective variables such as motivation and feelings toward Spanish, perceived value of Spanish, and self-concept of Spanish ability. Learning strategies which is regarded as a cognitive construct in this study was also investigated. Teachers also responded to questionnaires which assessed mainly their pedagogical strategies.

The findings from descriptive statistics reveal that grade 7 students demonstrated a fairly good performance, just beyond the sixty percent level, on the overall Spanish test, whereas their grade 9 counterparts displayed only mediocre Spanish test performance just beyond a fifty percent mark. In grade 7 there were statistically significant differences in students' overall test performance based on: (a) socio-economic background (SEB) in favour of students of high SEB; (b) parental interest and involvement (ParIntInv) in favour of students with parents least interested and involved; (c) self-concept of Spanish ability (SelConAb) in favour of students with high SelConAb; and (d) teaching strategies (TeaStr) in favour of students whose teachers used the most effective strategies. For the grade 9 students only motivational strength and self-concept of Spanish ability showed

significant differences in the overall test performance in favour of strong motivation and high SelConAb.

T-tests for independent samples conducted for each grade on the three variables, gender, school type and school location, reveal that only school type and school location demonstrated significant effects on Spanish performance ,and this was only for grade 7. No significant influences were observed for grade 9.

Correlation analysis gave an indication of the strength of the relationship between the independent variables and Spanish Test performance. Stepwise multiple regression analyses provided a clearer picture of the associations through the percentage of variance contributions of the independent variable on Spanish performance. The larger the variance contribution the greater is the power of the particular independent variable to predict students' Spanish achievement. For grade 7 the largest contributions to variance were school type, self-concept of Spanish ability, and teaching strategies in descending order. The dominant contribution for grade 9 was self-concept of Spanish ability. This was followed by perceived value of Spanish and motivational strength.

The superior Spanish performance of grade 7 over grade 9 students was in keeping with the teachers' disclosure that this was the general pattern which existed. Teachers acknowledged that the complexity of the grade 9 Spanish contributed to this pattern. This makes it incumbent on teachers to be creative and constantly analyse and review their instructional procedures so that students can gain greater benefit from Spanish study.