

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CORRELATES OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON GRADE SIX ACHIEVEMENT TEST (GSAT) IN LANGUAGE ARTS

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ABSTRACT

During slavery many of the slaves in the Caribbean societies were uneducated and did not have access to secondary-to-tertiary level education. After Independence in Jamaica, secondary-to-tertiary level education was opened to the general populace. Statistics from the Statistical Institute of Jamaica indicated that literacy has increased from 50% in the early 1970s to over 70% in the last decade. But despite this fact, about 75% of those graduating from secondary schools cannot read or successfully passed English Language. In 2014 only 63% of those who sat Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) Language Arts were successful.

OBJECTIVES: The objectives of this study are 1) to determine whether there is a statistical relationship between the Students' Attitude towards School and Community Index and Language Arts score of students in a selected High School in Jamaica; 2) examine whether students whose parents are employed have a greater Language Arts score compared to those who are unemployed; and 3) evaluate whether gender, age, and parental employment status are factors which determine students Language Arts Scores in a selected Primary School in Jamaica.

METHODS: This study used a cross-sectional non-probability design to evaluate the various objectives. The sample size was 140 seventh graders from a selected high school in Jamaica. The data were analyzed using the SPSS for Windows version 22.0, with the level of significance being 5%.

RESULTS: The general perception of students' attitude towards school was very high (i.e., 76.5 ± 7.5 ; $75.2-77.7$; out of a maximum of 94). When the Students' Attitude towards School and Community was disaggregated, it was found that they had a stronger feeling towards their school (42.9 ± 6.5 ; $41.8-44.0$) than their community (28.4 ± 4.1 ; $27.8-29.1$).

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Furthermore, on average, the performance of students in Language Art is moderate, $66.1\% \pm 9.2\%$; $64.5\% - 67.6\%$. Furthermore, no linear statistical association existed between the academic performance in Language Arts and students' perception of attitude towards school and community- $r_{xy} = 0.073$, $P = 0.383$.

CONCLUSION: This study has provided invaluable insights into the performance of students who wrote GSAT Language Arts, more research are needed and educators cannot continue with to the traditional mode of educating children in Jamaica.

KEYWORDS: Academic Performance, GSAT, Jamaica, Language Arts, Secondary School, Socio-Economic Background.

INTRODUCTION

It is believed that socialization has a lot to do with the development of students and their academic performance (Bandura, 1977a). Saudino (2005) states that, "There is no shortage of theories explaining behavioural differences among children" (p.112), which goes from the social to the psychological viewpoint of learning. Psychologists believe that a child's behaviour has a lot to do with the environment in which he/ she grows up as well as the genes pass on from their parents. Saudino (2005, p.94) continues by saying that, "genes begin the process: behavioral geneticists commonly claim that DNA accounts for 30-50 percent of our behaviours, this is an estimate that leaves 50-70 percent to be explained by environment" which implies that social environment is a critical component of knowledge accumulation and that it does shape the individual's final outcome. Therefore it can be said that behaviour from individuals is not just influenced by genes, but is also influenced by the environment in which one socializes. Another researcher Harris (2006) postulates that the complex web of social relationships that students experience with peers, adults in the school, and family members, exerts a much greater influence on their behavior than researchers had previously assumed, which

supports the social learning theory developed by Bandura (1977).

As students explore their life in school (i.e., a social milieu), two factors affect their academic performance and behaviour, socialization and social statuses. Jenson (2009) opines that the socioeconomic condition plays an important part in this situation. He continues to say that, children raised in poverty are faced with overwhelming situations where they are forced to confront and their brains tend to accept life as it is and they will demoralize good school performance. According to Kenny, Gallagher, Alvares-Salvat and Silsby (2002, p.224), "Many low-SES children face emotional and social instability. Typically, the weak or anxious attachments formed by infants in poverty become the basis for full-blown insecurity during the early childhood years. Very young children require healthy learning and exploration for optimal brain development." If a child is not properly nurtured their brain will be unsecured and emotionally unstable. Unfortunately, some researchers believe that in some poor families there tends to be a higher incidence of teen motherhood, depression, and inadequate health care, all of which lead to decreased sensitivity toward the infant (van Ijzendoorn, 2004) and, later to poor school

performance and behaviour on the child's part. Social theorists have practically established that one's behaviour is a product of his/her social milieu (Bandura, 1977; van Ijzendoorn, 2004; Jenson, 2009; Harris, 2006), suggesting that people are the sum of their social and physical space. Such perspective, while holding some explanation for human behaviour, has failed to include the cognitive domain to people and therefore, human learning is equally influenced by social conditions as well as by the psychological conditions.

In his book, Maslow (1943, p102) states that, "For all students, no matter where they live, attend school, or spend their free time there are certain basic needs that must be met in order for higher levels of education to be attained." The basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy theory are food, shelter, and love. If these needs are not met, their growth needs such as curiosity and understanding cannot be met. Maslow not only supports the social conditions that influence human behaviour, he highlights that human behaviour can be impacted upon by those factors as well as the psychological tenets. Hence, in order to examine and prescribe intervention programmes for learning deficiency, the social environment must be taken into consideration as well as psychological factors.

**For decades Jamaicans have been complaining about the poor state of the education system, some is calling for a change and others pleading ignorance. In 2007 a group of scholars in the Department of Government: social methodologists conducted a national survey and found that education was identified by Jamaicans as the third leading national problem (Powell, Bourne & Waller, 2007). Could we consider this to be the supporting changes in the educational system that took place in the late 1990s at the Primary level? The Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) in Jamaica replaced the Common Entrance in the year

1999. The subjects students are tested on are Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and Communication Task. Before the GSAT subjects were introduced, the different stakeholders of education believed that students were not really exposed to Science, Social Studies and a writing task.

A heavy concentration was spent on Mathematics and Language Arts in the Common Entrance Examination, which led to the neglect of Science and Social Studies. The GSAT examination was developed by different examiners and stakeholders as an entrance examination, but later it advanced as a placement examination for high school. Hence, such examination did not reduce the thinking of Jamaicans that were expressed in the findings of the national survey conducted by Powell, Bourne & Waller (2007). The educational system, therefore, requires some adjustments and the difficulty is that, there seem to be no answer forthcoming. Why are Jamaican students, particularly at the primary and secondary level, performing at the academic level as they are? Passes in the GSAT examinations, especially in English Language (called Language Arts), has never reached 70% in the history of the examination, and this warrants immediate explanation, as to why this is the case.

Children do not have power over the circumstances in which they are born and raised. The researcher has worked at an inner-city school for a number of years as well as is currently working in the rural community. It has always been a concern for me as a teacher and as a researcher. Why are the students underperforming, especially in the Language Arts at the GSAT level? It can be seen that the Principal and staff have implemented a number of strategies to improve literacy but yet, the students' behaviour and attitude towards education has not improve. Although the researcher would love to concentrate only on

her teaching techniques and move along with the lesson that is planned, the researcher has learnt once again that you cannot disconnect the student from their living experiences, which is how they are socialized as well as their experiential background. So the researcher has decided to take an interest to conduct a research on the social environment as well as attitude of students in an attempt to ascertain how they affect the learning outcome in Language Arts.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

"It is sinful! Absolutely sinful!" declared Seaga (2011), he goes on to say that, "Parents are befuddled by the expanse of the curriculum, which exceeds their own school experience. Unnecessary material has been added to the primary school curriculum that will be, more or less, repeated at the secondary level." It is believed that the topics taught in GSAT are a repetition of what they will learn in the secondary school. Packer (2008) stated, "Too much is taught in the GSAT. It's too much, too soon." As children develop the concepts should be more in depth and be at their level of development. So, are the aforementioned perspectives accounting for the dismal performance of candidates in Language Arts? Or, are there other things including the social and psychological milieu that are contributing to the performance deficiency at the primary level in Jamaica?

With this in mind the Grade Six Language Arts Examination was of keen interest to the researcher. Does a child environmental background and how they are socialized affect how they speak and how they write their examination? (Ministry of Education, 1999) wrote that:

The Language Arts curriculum aims to sensitize pupils to the richness and variety of language. A major objective is to assist student to acquire

the target language, Jamaican Standard English. The curriculum is therefore organized to provide practice in four areas: oral language (written and speaking), reading, writing and language awareness. The curriculum is therefore developed around units based on board themes integrating the language skills. The Units include Poems, Sports, Life across Climatic Zones, Folk Tales and All about Vehicles.

This curriculum will prepare students for the annual examination which occurs every March. As a teacher it was analyzed after the students have completed their Examination that students tend to write how they speak based on their experiential background. Hence, with context of the various outlined issues, the researcher believes it is fitting to conduct a study on GSAT Language Arts performance and examine what is affecting the performance deficiency experienced by sixth graders. Thus, the purposes of this study are 1) determine the statistical correlation between the Students' Attitude towards School and Community and Language Arts score for a group of selected Primary School students in Jamaica; and 2) examine the influence of age, gender and the employment status as well as subjective social class of students' parents on Language Arts score among a selected group of primary school students in Jamaica.

LITERATURE REVIEW

STUDENTS' ATTITUDE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

According to the oxford dictionary, attitude is considered to a settled way of thinking and feeling about something. A well-known psychologist Jung (1961), further states that, attitude is a readiness of the psyche to act/react in a certain way. A comprehensive of the literature revealed plethora of studies that have empirically shown a positive statistical

correlation between attitude and academic performance (Awang, et al., 2013; Mendezabal, 2013; Michelli, 2013; Li, 2012; Farooq, Chaundhry, & Berhanu, 2011; Wegner, Garcia-Santiago, Nishimura, & Hishinuma, 2010; Erdogan, Bayram & Deniz, 2008; Sarwar, 2004; Marks, 1998; Battistich & Horn, 1997). The mathematical model of Martin Ford's Motivational Systems Theory (MST) was displayed by Mendezabal (2013) to show factors that influence performance and achievement:

Achievement = (Motivation x Skill) x Responsive Environment Eqn. (1)

Performance = Ability x Motivation Eqn., 2)

According to Mendezabal (2013), "The formula [eqn. (1)] proposes that actual "achievement and competence are the results of a motivated, skillful, and biologically capable person interacting with a responsive environment" (Ford, 1992 in Mendezabal 2013, p. 3). Equation (2) is a formula that shows that performance is a multiplicative function of both ability and motivation. Such equations clearly indicate that attitude influences performance or achievement of people, which is also the case among students (; Michelli, 2013; Li, 2012; Farooq, Chaundhry, & Berhanu, 2011; Wegner, Garcia-Santiago, Nishimura, & Hishinuma, 2010; Erdogan, Bayram & Deniz, 2008; Sarwar, 2004; Marks, 1998; Battistich & Horn, 1997).

A search of academic databases, google scholar, and general research articles on did not find a single study that contradicts Ford's mathematical framework. A survey research conducted by Wegner et al. (2010) found that positive attitude directly impacts on academic achievement, with the model accounting for 29.3% of the variability of violent behaviour among 325 youths. In fact, they had that "Five variables were significant: grade point average, pressure to choose between school and friends,

favorable school attitude, feeling safe, and importance of college. Schools serving these populations should focus on fostering positive bonds between teachers and students and building bridges to families and neighborhoods." Even when the sample varies from children to university students, the recheck relationship existed between attitude and academic performance (Ran & Kausar, 2011; Sarwar, et al., 2010; Singh, 2011; Yu, 2011).

One other main objective is to focus on promoting the personal character traits of an individual that will become the norm dictated by society (Kelly, 1999). In doing so it is intended the person could be able to openly say his or her own ideas and also display a permissive attitude toward those whose opinions or beliefs differ from his or her own. The person can also value and protect his or her own freedom and also actively encourage the basic rights and privileges to which all humans are entitled to. Another objective is promoting avenues for persons to work on achieving their full capacity to become something in the future, (Kelly, 1999).

Due to the relevance of meeting certain GSAT requirements which can be difficult, one has to take into consideration the students economic and social positions. Based on the above students' circumstances, studies will have to be carried out to show how it impacts their academic success and this is one such study which seeks to identify if low socio-economic background and students attitude to school affects their academic performance. Tucholka (2006) stated that to bring about changes in education then a relevant instrument would be standardized test. To truly understand the results of a standardized test we have to take into considerations the many elements that help to bring about a particular situation.

STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

However, Shever and Walls (1998) mentioned that there are several factors involved in the academic performances concerning children other than their social background. The arguments surrounding socioeconomic status and academic performance are common among many studies (Gasva & Moyo, 2014; Heyneman, 2005; Levine, 2009; Steven & Schaller, 2009; Suleman, Aslam, Shakir, Akhtar, Hussain, & Akhtar, 2012). Okpala, Okpala and Smith (2001) concluded that where there is a greater level of money being spent for each student then their performances would also be higher, whereas schools where there is no cost to lunches or the lunch cost has been cut shows an undesirable effect on them. These schools where there is no cost to lunches or the lunch cost has been cut are given the title of low-income schools districts since they have as high population of low-income students from such named families. The standardized tests results are also affected since they tend to score lower than the higher income schools (Okpala, Okpala and Smith, 2001). In fact, studies have empirically established that the students in a low-income school district drive for academic success is often times not reinforced in the homes (Trusty, 1999).

The relationship between students' social and economic background and their academic performances has been an important and much discussed topic for many years among educators and stakeholders in Jamaica. Kelly (1999) stated that in order to truly see the academic successes of students many elements must be understood. Some of them involved the ethnic, religious, racial, gender, linguistic, social economic status, their hereditary and family circle to zero in on some that have been focused on. This study is about the relationship

between the social economic background of the student and their desired outcome. It will try to identify some of the factors which affect students' academic performance in Language Arts at the GSAT level. Researchers believed that for a student to be fully focused on their academia, their social needs has to be met, if not they are not contented and worry about these things. Barry (2005), also looked at how students' social economic situation and how it impacted their performance in academics. She came to the conclusion that if a student comes from a better social economic status, then his or her test scores will be significantly better.

This study will bring about a clearer understanding how students learning attitude and behaviour to learning correlates and affects their performances. According to Manzo (2008) he argued that students who do not have a strong family support system; we as educators need to encourage them and this is easily done in the elementary classrooms because by middle and high school, students have more firmly fixed attitudes. If they are not properly motivated they could develop an unresponsive attitude or a lack of self-assurance in school. These attitudes could be a result of the problems associated with financial situations in the home. For example, students are having a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from that particular problem. It is often shown that homes that have lower socioeconomic status tend to be more stressful on the family as a whole. If students are not provided with a reason for staying in school, he/she will simply abandon their course of study. In order to give them a reason for staying in school so that they can accomplish a desired result, they would need a stronger level of motivation such as satisfying their financial needs and providing a more secure alternative after their Secondary education has been completed. The students under focus in the large farming community studied needs to

know that there is room for social upward mobility in or outside of agriculture if they grasp at the level of motivation attributed to them.

As said earlier, students must first value themselves therefore as teachers we should not have different standards for different students but all should be graded on the same level promoting equality as this will develop their self-esteem. Vasquez (1988) supports the aforementioned argument and realized that students upon seeing that the standards were equal for all and that the teachers gave them a willing hand of support and necessary assistance through their actions came out as the highest achievers. If teachers believe in lower-achieving students capabilities and give them the necessary support and the same opportunities to succeed, they likely will do so.

STUDENTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

As well students should be actively involved in their learning meaning that they should show the willingness to learn, make earnest attempt to do well and pay attention in classes and depict certain attitudes such as having a feeling of energetic interest that will stimulate them to learn Language Arts. Once they are actively involved in their learning process they will do things to enhance their own learning. They will also display an interest leading to inquiry, a desire to be aware of information and positive intense feelings towards learning and school. Various studies have shown that obligation to work and a process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviours are vital elements in the success and learning of students. The researcher agrees that once students are a part of their own learning they will absorb more and enjoy and take pleasure in their learning activities more than students who are not engaged.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE VERSUS THE CREOLE LANGUAGE

A Gleaner article published on January 2, 2011 with Norman Thompson as the contributor spoke about the Language problems we are having in our schools from Elementary to Tertiary. His main cause of concern was that Jamaica had been struggling with a Language problem for over three to four decades in the Primary and Secondary levels. There is the need to do more than talking about the problem but the need calls for the addressing of the issue. Poverty is one of the main factors linked to the illiteracy problem. There are many language problems to be addressed at the Primary and Secondary levels which has impeding problems for future University studies.

For the period 2011 the Grade Four Literacy Test results were dismal which has serious implications for GSAT since 20% which equals to nine thousand pupils will not matriculate to sit it. Thompson 2011 went on to say that, the main causes of concern regarding the language are the teacher: student ratio in the Primary Schools, students their negative attitude to language, the ability to read and understand what was read and weak language skills. There is the need for students to see English as a language that they speak and understand that the Jamaica Creole is a limited language in a world where educated people are expected to speak English. There is nothing wrong if students learn their first language which is Creole as in other countries they embrace theirs and it does not prevent them from learning the main language spoken. Jamaican Creole was often embraced by the late Louise Bennett who often highlighted the benefits of speaking Creole, however one must remember than English is our main language and we should try to perfect it.

A major concern is that we do not practice the speaking of the language and attempt to correct our mistakes when trying to speak or learn it, (Ministry of Education, 2011). Most of the problems can be found at the Primary Level according to Thompson 2011, due to the fact that the classes are large which puts a terrible strain on the teacher's effectiveness in reaching the different types of learners. This problem has also found its way into the Secondary level and English should be taught as a foreign language just like how French and Spanish are oftentimes taught in smaller settings.

In the Jamaican setting a lot of our Creole speaking students cannot differentiate between English and Creole and at times think that they are indeed speaking English when in fact they are not (Jettka, 2010). Our students oftentimes feel too comfortable with what they know and don't think they need to learn anything new in terms of refreshing their language skills and when they feel a need to do so it's because the situation might dictate that. Also Bryan (2010) pointed out that it is much harder to teach this generation who has adopted the SMS-text messaging in formal documents and the researcher has also seen this problem creeping into the Secondary level since the writer made mention of the Tertiary level. All parents have a significant role to play in their children mastering or non-mastering of the language since the onus cannot solely be placed on the teachers because teachers are not the only players in the blame game since home is the first agent of socialization.

This can be concluded that whether students are learning mathematics, history or social studies they need to know aspects of English language, to help them relate to the cumbersome demands of the syllabus. However it has been noticed that the poor performance each year in the different types of subject areas, showed how important the Language Arts is in all aspect of the curriculum.

The National Assessment Programme, points out many weaknesses of students in the areas of Language Arts. This is showed at the GSAT level where only a dismal fifty percent of students are reading or performing at the grade 4 literacy level of comprehension. And statistic has shown that the weakest of them all is the spelling and writing sections. A vast number of students are failing in these areas. Other areas of GSAT such as Social Studies, Mathematics, Communication Task and Science proved that why these areas experienced lack of achievement is due to the fact of the students' low performance in their writing skills (Thompson, 2011).

Some teachers of grades 7-11 have always been complaining about students' attitude towards reading on their own, whether this may be non-fictional or fictional material. It is said that a book a day keep illiteracy away, so if a student practices reading a book then his/her vocabulary will be extended and he/ she would be capable of doing way better in the area of achieving their writing and spelling skills which are required to pass all subject areas. It is also important to note that once students attitude towards learning has change, there will be vast improvement not just in English Language, but also in all subject areas as well.

Another factor which impedes students' academic performance has to do with their low socio economic background (Wenglinsky, 1998). He mentioned that students from low socio economic background tend to have less educational opportunities than students from the middle class or the upper class families. Researchers believe that once there is financial stability there will be improvement in the academic performance by students. Heyneman (2005) agrees and stated that, "for many years it has been shown that students from a low socioeconomic background do not show effective performance in school.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research employs a quantitative (i.e., survey research) and qualitative (i.e., interviews) methodology. According to Creswell and Clark (2007), "mixed methodology research, involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process (p.54)." The evaluation will include a variety of data collection instruments and diverse participant groups. The quantitative analysis was stored in Microsoft Excel then converted to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 21.0), which allowed for the descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses, pie charts and bar graphs with the level of significance being 95% (i.e., $\alpha = 5\%$ at the two-tailed level). For the qualitative analysis, this was done by way of narrations. Non-probability sampling (purposive sampling) was used to draw the sample for this study.

SURVEY RESEARCH

At one point of our history, research had to be done using a positivistic perspective as this was considered the only avenue whereby science could be established in inquiries (Kuhn, 1996). Science was, therefore, predicated on objectivity, measurement, falsification, proof (Balashov and Rosenberg, 2002; Blalock, 1982) and meanings were omitted from scientific inquiries. The social science which was born after the natural science wanting to show and establish scientificity employed the same positivistic perspective as is the natural science (Balashov and Rosenberg, 2002; Kuhn, 1996). Hence, the employment and reliance on survey research in many of social science inquiries as this lends itself to objectivity, measurement and falsification. Blalock (1982) wanting to address the scientificity of the social sciences wrote a book entitled 'Conceptualization and measurement in the social sciences' in which he

addressed 1) theoretical constructions, 2) concepts, 3) theoretical process, and 4) methods that are associated with measurement theories and conceptualization (see also, Blalock, 1971, 1963, 1964, 1967; Blalock & Blalock, 1968). Many disciplines in the social sciences, like demography, economics and psychology, substantially rely on a positivistic perspective, and this accounts for a preponderance of studies utilizing survey research.

Survey research is embodied in a positivistic perspective and explains the usage of measurement, a standardized instrument, no meaning and the gather of objective data- Appendix III. Survey research replies on conceptualization and measurement of issues and precision as well as objectivity are critical to this methodology (Blalock, 1982). One scholars postulated that "Conceptualization involves a series of processes by which theoretical constructs, ideas, and concepts are classified, distinguished, and given definitions that make it possible to reach a reasonable degree of consensus and understanding of the theoretical ideas we are trying to express" (Blalock, 1982, p. 11).

He continued that "By measurement, we refer to the general process through which numbers are assigned to objects in such a fashion that it is also understood just what kinds of mathematical operations can legitimately be used" (Blalock, 1982, p. 11). Such perspectives offer insights into the utilization of survey research methodology by many researchers in the social sciences. This methodology is primarily conducted using a standardized questionnaire (Rea and Parker, 2005; Blalock, 1982; Powell, Bourne and Waller, 2007). For this study, the survey instrument comprised of 22 items, and detailed account of this is explained in the instrumentation section of this chapter.

INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews as this researcher felt it was necessary to ask both open and closed ended questions (Babbie, 2007; Neuman, 2006; Berg, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This is because for some questions a yes or no response will unearth the essence from the respondents; while for other questions, the researcher felt the need to go in-depth as new ideas will evolve that explain the phenomenon that was studied. In addition, this researcher also used this mixed method because in some cases there was the need to predetermine the questions as there were certain questions that the researcher felt needed to have been asked. However since this research did not want to limit the respondents' responses to a mere yes or no answer, the researcher also utilized the non-directive approach towards questioning the respondents. This allowed the interviewers to 'digress' by asking questions based on the respondents' responses given. Furthermore, this enabled the researcher to probe far beyond the given answers. By so doing, the research team was able to use formulated words (slangs coined within the environment with set understood meanings to the respondents) familiar to the people in question. Thus, enabling this researcher to communicate with the respondents in a better and more comfortable way as this was how they understood and perceived the world. As a result, this allowed the research team to approach them in their world-See Appendix IV.

The interviews took the form of a "guided conversation" (Rubin and Rubin 1995, Gubrium and Holstein 2001: 85) where the interviewees were seen not as "passive conduit for retrieving information", but more for interpretation and perspective thus facilitating a deep probe. The questions for the elite interviews were guided by the literature review and pre-existing notions of the researcher.

FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEW FORM

Focus group is a technique that involves people in a group discussion setting being prompted in the area under study (Neuman, 2006; Babbie, 2007). The researcher uses discussions in order to learn about the conscious, semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and socio-cultural characteristics amongst the group (Basch, 1987; Berg, 2001; 111). They were used in this research in order to explore the opinions, thoughts and attitudes of personnel from senior officers, policewomen in general, policewomen who suffer from hair disorders and the general public.

Two major advantages of focus group approach in qualitative research are (i) that the natural setting allows participants to freely express opinions, ideas and feelings and, (ii) focus groups foster expression amongst marginalized social groups. Within the hierarchical structure of paramilitary forces, the most marginalized groups are located at the base or street-level. However, once members are not on duty they often expressed themselves unimpeded. Within the context of the focus group discussions, participants quickly abandoned the rank structure and openly expressed their thoughts, feelings and desires thus developing what Stewart & Shamdasani, (1990) and Sussman et al., (1991) call the synergistic group effect in which interactions among and between group members stimulate discussions and reactions (in Berg, 2001; 112) having gained the trust of the researcher.

For this study, the focus-group interview was conducted in this study consisting of semi-structured interview with two groups of fifteen students; questions from the questionnaire were checked by two experts.

The two main questions used will be designed to obtain students' opinions and attitudes about their school and community-See Appendix IV.

SAMPLING

The sampling that this research took was the Stratified sampling; this is where the researcher divided the population into subgroups such that each unit belongs to a single stratum (e.g., low achievers, medium achievers, high achievers) and then selects units from those strata. In this case the low socioeconomic background students will be selected based on their involvement in the PATH Programme. The sampling of this mixed methods study needed sampling that is a combination of the characteristics typical of qualitative and quantitative sampling, and each of the types is used for either the quantitative or qualitative phase of the research.

“The size of samples used in one study may differ from large groups to a small number of units. The decisions concerning sampling are made before the study starts, however, for qualitative phases decisions may be taken in the course of the study,” (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). Hence, the researcher conveniently selected a particularly secondary school, four seventh grade classes and students in order to complete this thesis. A total of 140 respondents were drawn from four seventh grade classes for the survey and two focus sessions were held. Each session had about fifteen respondents.

PROCEDURE

The study included a pilot. The pilot study was conducted in February 2015. The purposes of the pilot were 1) to examine the readability of the material for seventh graders, 2) the suitability of the questions, 3) establishment of the final instruments, and 4) understanding the research design and implementation process.

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, introductory letters were forward to parents and the Principal of the selected school-See

Appendices I and II. The introductory letters outlined the nature of the study, ethical issues and rationale for the research. Written consent letters were sent to all the students in the four selected seventh grade classes. Only those who returned the signed consent forms were admitted into the study. The ethical issues were outlined to the participants, they were made aware that anonymity will be done and they could withdraw at any time of the study if they felt uncomfortable.

Several instruments were examined by the researcher before a final one was constructed. The researcher consulted established instruments and modifications were made in keeping with the culture and level of the sampled respondents. After the instrument was coalesced by the researcher it was forwarded to my supervisor who vetted the documents, make corrections and this was also submitted to other experts in Educations, Sociology and Psychology. The purpose of doing this is to ensure that the instrument captured all the elements of the intended purpose, meet the required standard of a master thesis and is relevant to the subject matter. There were two research instruments-standardized survey instrument and an interview schedule.

INSTRUMENTATION

Prior to constructing the survey instrument (i.e. questionnaire), the researcher reviewed ‘Designing and Conducting Survey Research’ by Rea and Parker (2005). The text provided critical insights in the construction of a questionnaire, which was equally aided by a probability sample survey that was carried out by Powell, Bourne and Waller (2007). Based on the information within Rea and Parker (2005) and Powell, Bourne and Waller (2007), the researchers formulated three standardized questionnaires (for Jamaicans, police women and Senior Police Officers) and Interview

Instruments. All those items were written in English.

The Questionnaire used in the study was prepared by the researcher based on questionnaire in the literature (Stufflebeam, 2007; Shi, 2006) and it was checked by two experts. The survey consists of twenty-two questions. These include questions pertaining to demographics of the participants, their attitude towards learning and statements about Grade Six Language Arts on a 5-point-Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree)-See Appendix III.

Wallen and Freankel (2001), state that researchers should focus on collecting reliable, valid data using instruments. For this reason, the researcher developed the instruments used in this study in consultation with experts in order to ensure content-related validity. Moreover, reliability of the instrument was checked by implementing a pilot survey with GSAT students beforehand and then for the final study. Cronbach alpha for the final instrument was 0.701.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected through questionnaires, including closed ended questions; a focus group interview; and a closed ended questionnaire. Primarily, data were entered into Microsoft Excel, and then later transferred to the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows Version 22.0. The Descriptive analysis was applied to the data collected from the questionnaire close-ended questions-include means, standard deviations, and graphs. Bivariate analyses were conducted by way of Pearson's Product Moment Correlations, scatter diagrams, Independent sample t-test and Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression. A p value of <5% was used to

determine the level of significance for this research. Whereas the data collected from interview was analyzed by way of narratives (Ayres, Kavanaugh, and Knafl (2003), with data categories of significant statements presented according to different themes. Intercoder reliability with regard to the emerging themes was rated according to Miles and Huberman (1994).

The modus operandi of data collection in this research included: meticulous planning, testing of the questionnaire, ethical and professionalism preparation, this is also supported by Punch (1998). The examination of data will occur concomitantly with data collection so that the two phases amalgamate. The reasons for this is that there was danger in the task of analyzing the large amounts of data and it was overwhelming and would have probably resulted in the project not being able to complete or a reduced quality of work (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was the Concurrent Mixed Methods Design-Triangulation Design was used to analyze the data.

The purpose of the Triangulation mixed methods design is to concurrently collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the outcome to understand the research problem. A basic justification for this design is that one data-collection form supplies strengths to offset the weaknesses of the other form. The quantitative scores on the questionnaire from many individuals provide strengths to offset the weaknesses of qualitative documents from a few people. Alternatively, qualitative, interview of a few people offers strength to quantitative data that does not adequately provide detailed information about the context in which individuals provide information (Creswell, 2008, pg. 557).

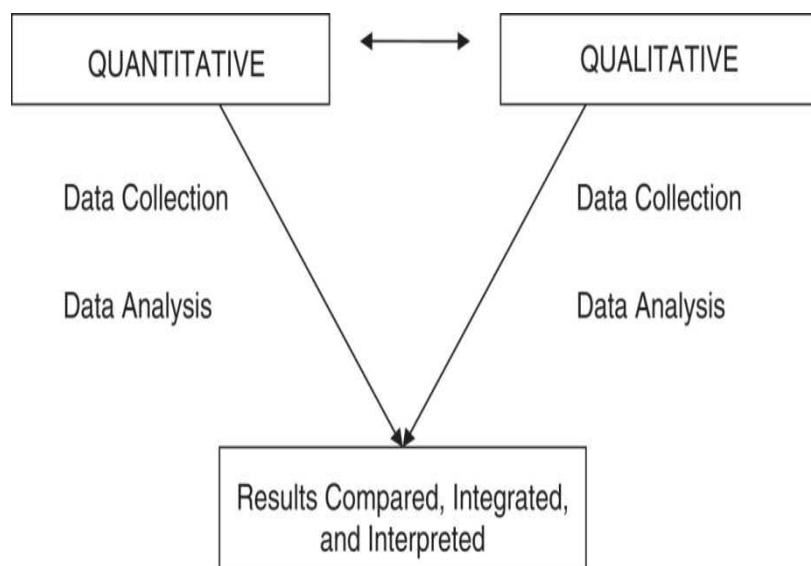


Figure 3.1. Concurrent Mixed Methods Design-Triangulation Design

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS- CONFIDENTIALITY

There was a range of data that was collected about participants for example: age, gender, occupation, and level of schooling. No names were used in the subsequent write-up of the research. At the beginning of each of the focus groups, participants were assured of confidentiality regarding the information they would give and the researcher not falsifying or presenting results out of context.

DATA REDUCTION

Content analysis was used in this research; this method is often used in qualitative and quantitative research methods. Some researchers view content analysis as a technique to quantify manifest (surface-level) descriptive data (Allen-Meares, 1985), wherein categories are developed, content is coded, and category counts are conducted. Qualitative content investigation typically does not change the content into numeric patterns; instead, recurrent themes, and typologies and illustrations of particular issues, are used.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

To exploit reliability, procedures which led to consistent results were used no matter who moderated the issuing of the questionnaires. These included a set of structured questions that would be used by all moderators. "The validity of the research design lies in the extent to which it is actually capable of providing the information that it claims to provide," (Dyer 1996, p.67). For the purposes of this research, content validity was assessed, by examining the content of the questionnaire questions, against the proposed purpose or intent of the research.

FINDINGS

Socio-demographic Characteristics, Attitude towards School and Community, and Academic Performance of the Sampled Respondents

Figure 4.1 depicts a pie graph of the gender of the sampled respondents. Of the sampled respondents (n=146), the response rate for the gender questioned was 95.9% (n=140). Of the valid response rate, the majority of the respondents were males (n=88, 62.9%) compared to 37.1% females (n=52).

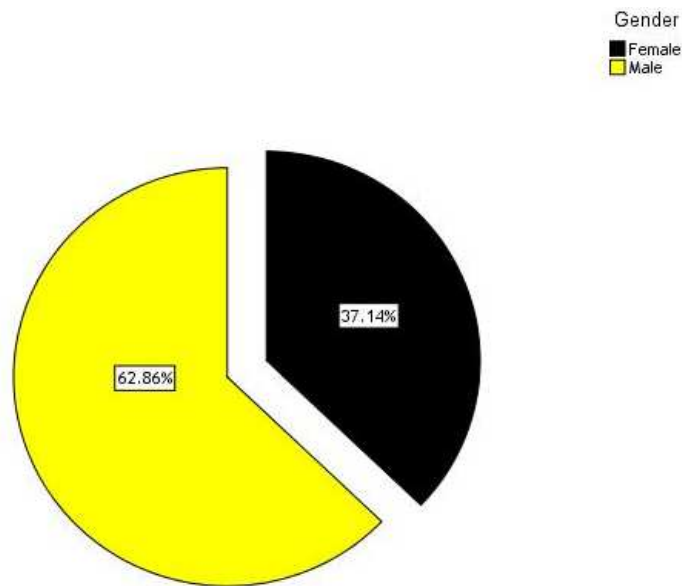


Figure 4.1. Gender of Respondents

Of the 146 sampled respondents, 92.5% (n=135) answered the age question-Figure 4.2. .2. Of those who responded to the age

question, 53.3% (n=72) were 12 years old compared to 43.0% (n=58) who were 13 years old and 3.7% (n=5) who were 14 years old.

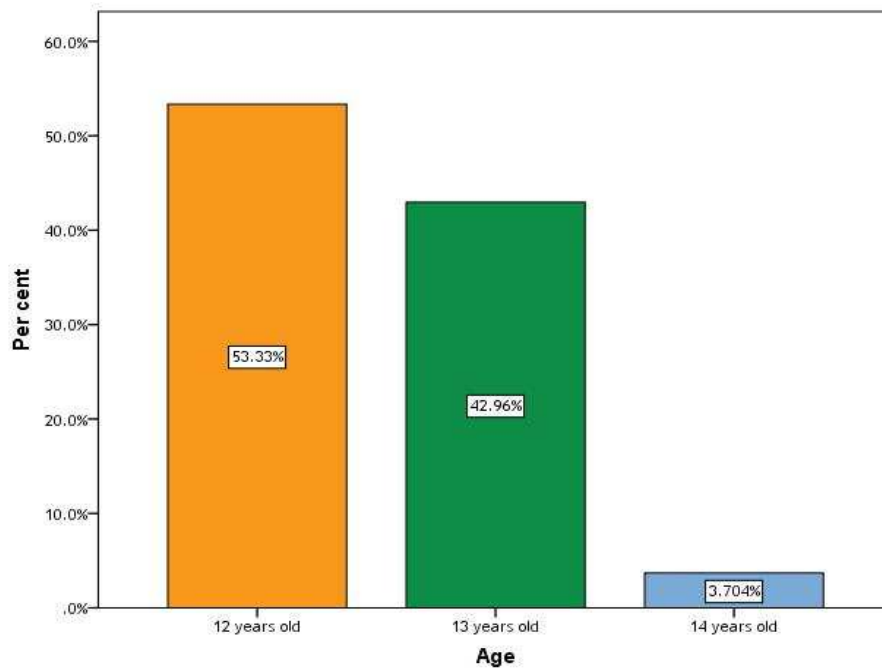


Figure 4.2. Age of respondents

Figure 4.3 disaggregated the age data by gender of respondents. Almost 31% (n=22) of those 12 years old were females compared to 69.44% (n=26) of males. Of those 14 years old, 40.0 % (n=2) were females compared to 60% of

males. Using the cross tabulation, no significant statistical correlation existed between gender and age of respondents- χ^2 (df=2) = 2.825, P = 0.243.

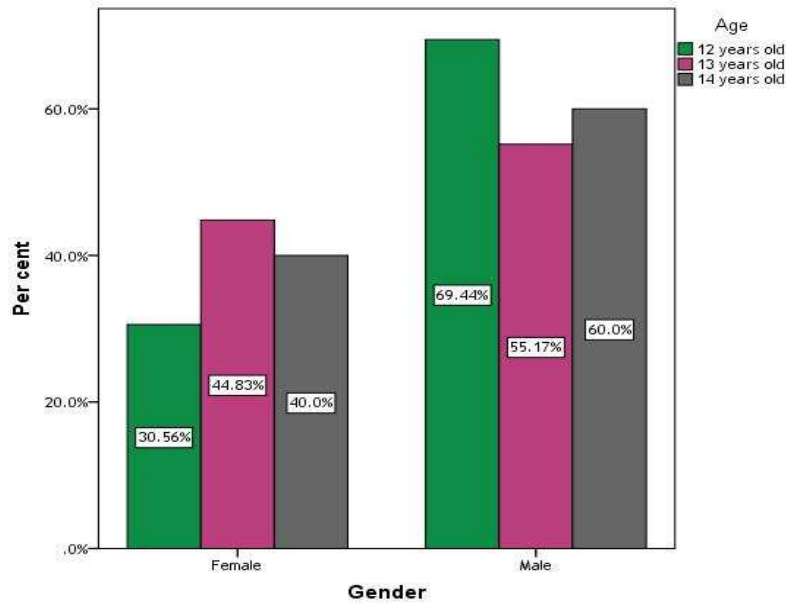


Figure 4.3. Composite Bar graph of gender by age of respondents

Figure 4.4 presents a pie graph of the respondents' view on the employment status of their parents. Of the sampled respondents (n=146), the response rate to aforementioned

issue was 93.8 % (n=137). The employment rate of the respondents' parents was 85.4% (n=117) compared to a 14.6% (n=20) unemployment rate.

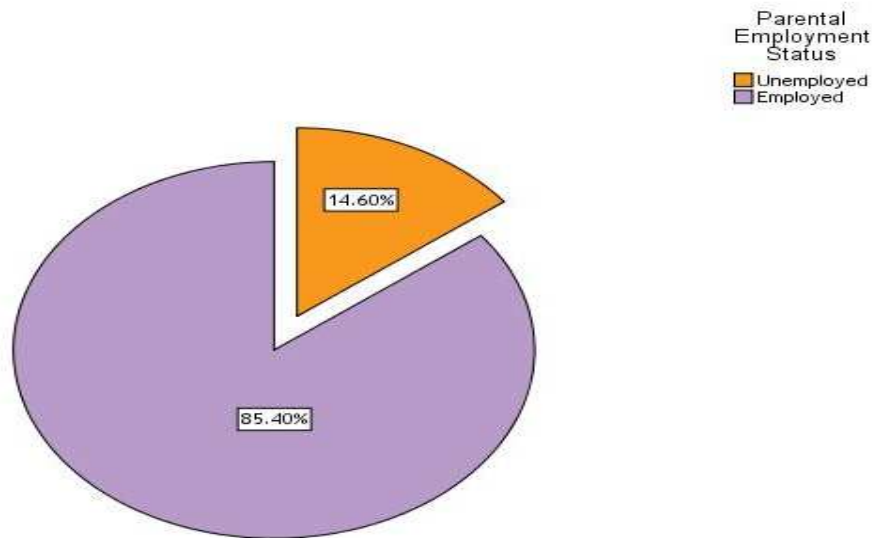


Figure 4.4. Respondents responses to the employment status of their parent(s)

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive statistics on attitude towards school & community index, sub-attitude towards schools and community indices, and Language Arts Performance. The general perception of students' attitude towards school was very high (i.e., 76.5±7.5; 75.2-77.7; out of a maximum of 94). When the Students' Attitude towards School and

Community was disaggregated, it was found that they had a stronger feeling towards their school (42.9±6.5; 41.8-44.0) than their community (28.4±4.1; 27.8-29.1). Furthermore, on average, the performance of students in Language Art is moderate, 66.1±9.2%; 64.5%-67.6%.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics on the Perception of Students' Attitude towards Schools and Community Index as well as Academic performance (i.e. Language Arts Score)

Details	Descriptive statistics
Attitude towards School & Community Index	76.5±7.5; 75.2-77.7
Sub-Attitude towards School & Community Indices:	
Attitude towards School Index	42.9±6.5; 41.8-44.0
Attitude toward Community Index	28.4±4.1; 27.8-29.1
Language Arts Score (i.e. Language Arts Performance)	66.1%±9.2%; 64.5%-67.6%

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Is there a statistical relationship between Students' Attitude towards School and Community and Language Arts score among a group of students in a selected Primary School in Jamaica?

The relationship between students' attitude towards school and community index and

language arts score was examined by way of a scatter plot (Figure 4.5) and confirmed by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. By eyeballing the scatter plot, there was no clear linear pattern between Students' Attitude towards School and Community and Language Arts score among a group of students in a selected Primary School in Jamaica- $r_{xy} = 0.073, P = 0.383$.

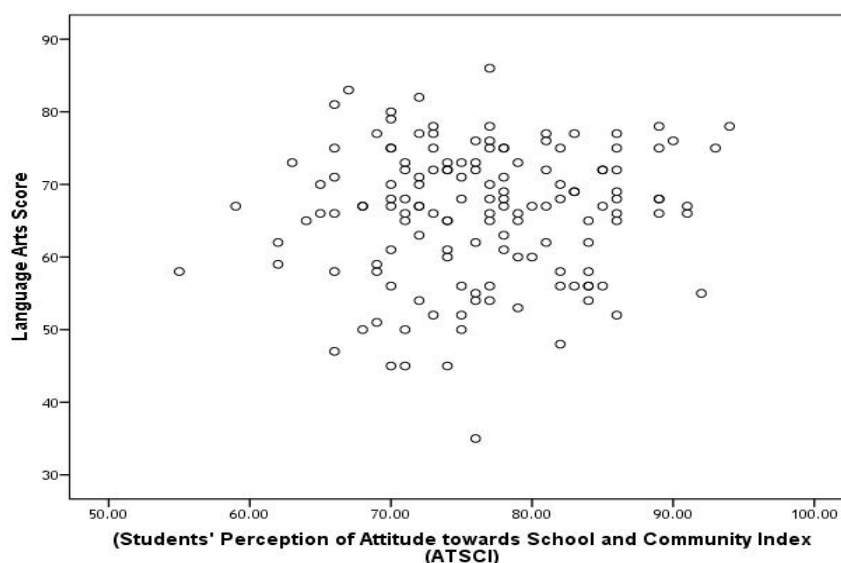


Figure 4.5. Scatter plot of Language Arts Scores and Students' Perception Attitude towards School and Community Index

Figures 4.7 and 4.8 depict disaggregated scatter plots of the students' attitude towards community as well as school and academic performance in language arts.

The relationship between students' attitude towards community index and language arts score was examined by way of a scatter plot

(Figure 4.7) and confirmed by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. By eyeballing the scatter plot, there is no clear linear statistical association between students' attitude towards community index and language arts score, which is supported by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation- $r_{xy} = 0.092, P = 0.274$.

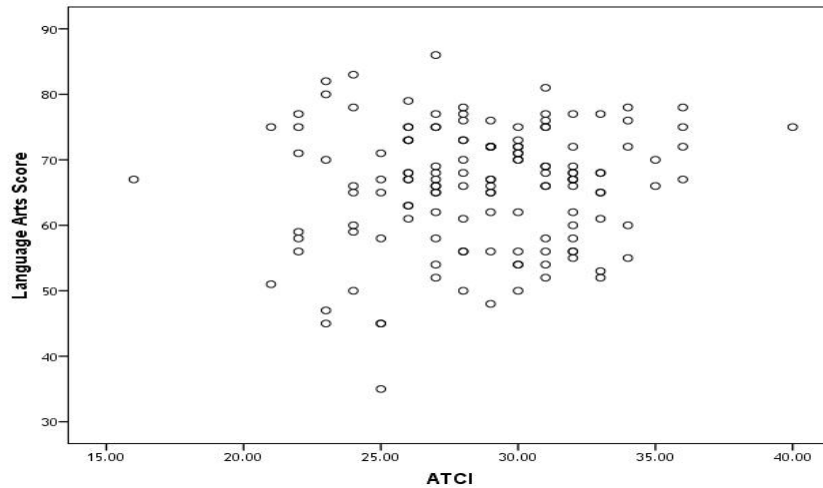


Figure 4.7. Scatter plot of Language Arts Scores and Students' Attitude towards Community Index

The relationship between students' attitude towards school index and language arts score was examined by way of a scatter plot (Figure 4.6) and confirmed by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. By eyeballing the scatter plot, there is not clear linear

statistical association between students' attitude towards school index and language arts score, which is supported by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation $r_{xy} = -0.002$, $P = 0.986$.

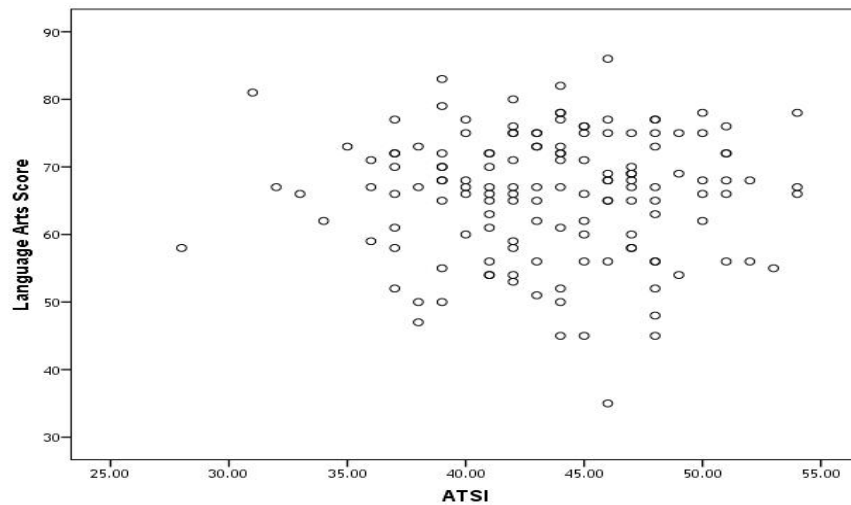


Figure 4.6. Scatter plot of Language Arts Scores and Students' Attitude towards School Index

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Do age, gender, and the employment status as well as the subjective social class of students' parents influence the Language Arts score among a selected group of primary school students in Jamaica

To answer this research question, the researcher used both box plot and Independent sample t-test. The box plot is depicted below in

(Figure 4.7) and the work of this approach is enhanced by way of Independent Sample t-test. By eyeballing the box plot, the average score for students who indicated that their parents were unemployed was the same as those who indicated that they were employed. Further inquiry, by way of Independent sample t-test, indicated that mean score for students whose parents was employed is $66.3\% \pm 9.4\%$ compared to $66.2\% \pm 9.2\%$ for those whose parents were unemployed- $t=0.039$, $P = 0.969$.

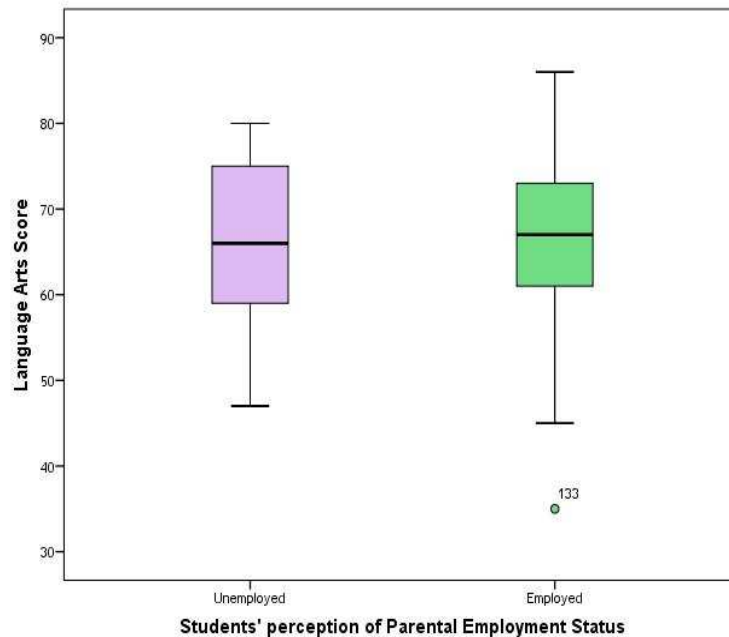


Figure 4.7. Box plot of Language Arts Scores and Students' perception of Parental Employment Status

At the commencement of the focus groups sessions, the first question that was asked to the students was, 'Describe the socio-economic status of your parents?' The majority of the respondents said their parents were primarily low income farmers. One young male said that "My family and I have never gone to bed hungry; but we lack many of the nice times such as vacations, summer vacations overseas, having educated parents who are lawyers, doctors, and so on". When this was expressed Carlos (pseudo name), for a moment indicated he want to speak, but a long silence followed; then he said "That is so true". Marlene (pseudo name) quietly whispered "So true. I would love to take a trip overseas, visit Riu or the Jamaica Grande, see my parent on television giving a speech or being a part of a group discussion. But, it may never happen in this lifetime". A chorus answer evolved after Marlene spoke forwarding that, "We are mostly from low-income household, farmers children". However, Ashmeade was the only participant in the session who indicated that he is from a middle-

class family with his mother being a teacher and father, an engineer. To provide some more context of the socio-economic background of the students at the sampled school, the research consulted a document published in 2011 on the school. In it was this statement "...many of the students come from challenging socio-economic circumstances..." (National Education Inspectorate, 2011, 5), which supports the general perspective of the participants that they are mostly from low socio-economic background and this offers some context to the students people.

Using OLS regression (Table 4.2), numbers of the selected socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, age cohort and parental employment status) were examined as to their likely correlation with Language Arts Performance among a group of primary school students. Neither age, gender, nor the respondents' perception of their parental employment status was correlated with the students' performance in Language Arts- $P > 0.05$; $F[4, 128] = 0.090$, $P = 0.985$.

Table 4.2. Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected demographic variables on Language Arts Performance

	Unstandardized Coefficients		t-statistic	P value	95% Confidence Interval
	B	Std. Error			Lower-Upper
Constant	66.6	5.3	12.654	0.000	56.2-77.0
Gender	-0.003	1.7	-0.002	0.999	-3.4-3.4
12 years old	-0.4	4.8	-0.088	0.930	-10.0-9.1
13 years old	0.5	4.9	0.107	0.915	-9.1-10.1
14 years old (reference group)					
Parental Employment status	-0.3	2.4	-0.133	0.894	-5.0-4.4

Figure 4.8 depicts a box-plot which analyzed the academic performance of students and their perceived socio-economic status of parents. There is a clear disparity between the academic performances of students whose parents are in the middle class compared to those in the lower class. On average the academic performance of students who

believed that their parents are in the middle class was 72.4%±4.8% (95%CI: 71.2-73.5) compared to 58.4%±7.2% (95%CI: 56.7-60.2) for those in the lower class. Using Independent sample t-test, a statistical significance existed between two aforementioned categories- $t_{108}=13.395$, $P < 0.0001$

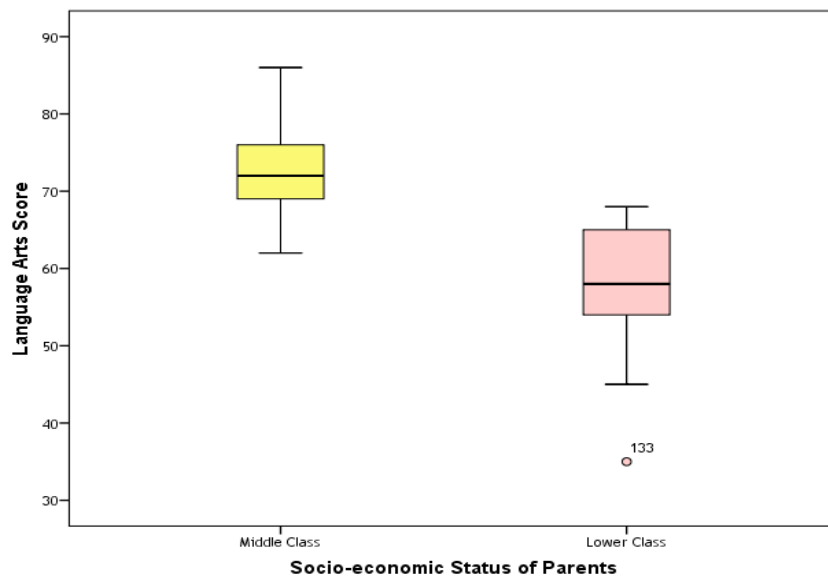


Figure 4.8.Box-plot of Socio-economic Status of Parents and Academic performance of students

The focus group sessions provided invaluable insights into the perception of students and why academic performance is as it is. During the sessions, when the question of; ‘How do you feel about attending this school and your community?’ Some insightful revelations emerged and this will provide some context to the academic performance of the students. There was a lengthy silence and the moderator had to jolt the discussion by saying, “No one

will identify you, nobody will know that you were the one that commented and so you can be candidly and express as you so desire”. It was then that Marcus (pseudo name) in a husky baritone said, “I hate this school and I’m just waiting for after graduation to leave this farming community.” He continued, “I don’t see myself as a farmer, I want to be a doctor or an engineer-flying airplanes all over the world. However, my parents, particularly my father

believes everybody should till the soil". Then an avalanche of comments began pouring in and the moderator had to beckon the person who should speak.

Sophia (pseudo name) a young female indicated that, "I hate this school. I don't know why I'm here in the first place." She remarked that "I was not placed at this school. My average was in the 80s, with 10 in Communication Task. The Ministry of Education, called the Principal of this school and so I was afterwards placed here. I wanted to attend St. Hilda's High school, I had the scores for it, yet still I was unfortunately placed here. I hate it, I really hate it here." Before she could say another word, "No one wants to come here by choice," Matthew (pseudo name) said. He continued, "It was not among my five choices", which was agreed to by the other participants.

You could feel the disdain for the choice to be at this school, the hate was intense and bitter must be having some impact on the performance of the children. "This school is a death sentence," Antoinette (pseudo name) remarked. After which, Anthony said, "I did not want to be here, it was the Ministry of Education decision to send many of us here, without our consent and our parents had to comply because they are not financial influential or well-known in the society". It was two sessions of angry participants; they hated everything to do with the sampled school and their community. Despite their venom Malick said, "The teachers are qualified, they can teach, they are competent; but, I do like it here. It is not my choice. I don't feel that my efforts have been properly awarded by the Ministry of Education. I feel like I have been robbed by the Ministry of Education." The dislike among the sampled respondents was a clearly psychological battle to attend school and this mindset is clearly reducing academic

achievement and this must be addressed with urgency.

When the interviewer asked, "Would you want a transfer to another school", all the participants said 'yes'. In fact, a little girl who seemed out of place spoke for the first time and opined, "Look at my GSAT scores; I don't believe it was right for them to send me here. My average is 82% and I was placed at this school, while a friend of mine was sent to St. Hilda's with an average of 80%," Lorraine (pseudo name) remarked. She brought the GSAT scores to the moderator, the average was confirmed and this was later endorsed by the principal. "People don't see this school as a good traditional high school because of the CSEC results; I wanted to attend St. Hilda's. I worked for a place at a good school, and here I am", she said. One male said "It is the price for hard work. So, why should I work hard again?" Then, Mario (pseudo name), approximately 5'10" about 180 pound postulated, "I only attend school because I must; I can't stop at the moment." This jolted the interviewer, the bitterness was intense, and none of the participants wanted to remain at this school.

"Why me? Why me?" Rolando (pseudo name) said. This summarizes a high level of dissatisfaction among the participants. "I have lost faith in the school, I have lost my drive to work hard and achieve, because this is what I get, this school", Nicole (pseudo name) mentioned. The researcher chose to use Kern (pseudo name) to complete the comments as it aptly supports the issue of the research question. He said "Only if my parents were not poor, I would have had the instructional materials and resources to better some better grade for another traditional high school. The worst thing is that, they are not influential so I am stuck here for another five years. There is nowhere out, but to sit in class each day and hope for a miracle.

DISCUSSION

For centuries during slavery, the Africans in the Caribbean were not education. Simply put it this way, many African Caribbean people were illiterate, unable to read and comprehend written English literature. It was after Independence in Jamaica (August 6, 1962) that there was a wholesale policy to educate the populace beyond the primary level. This means that Afro-Caribbean Jamaicans were able to vote, but many of them were unable to read, comprehend written English documents and respond in its kind. It was this reality that led former Prime Minister, Michael Manley, to introduce the Jamaica Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL, which is currently Jamaica Foundation for Lifelong Learning) programme in 1974 that was geared towards adult Jamaicans literacy (Foster, 2006; Neita, 2013). Michael Manley instituted JAMAL because of the problem of adult illiteracy and the fact that literacy among Jamaicans ages 15+ years was at 53% (Foster, 2006). It can be deduced from the aforementioned statistics that a substantial per cent of the 15+ populace were unable to read, comprehend and write English and so in for there to be development, the education of the population had to be a priority of the government, which was the rationale behind JAMAL in the 1970s. The issue had to be reading, which must be extended to early childhood in order to reduce the continued high illiteracy of the 15+ years old Jamaicans. International Reading Association (IRA) offered an explanation of how illiteracy could be reduced this way that:

A professional with advanced preparation and experience in reading who has responsibility for the literacy performance of readers in general and of struggling readers in particular. Such individuals may work at one or more of the following levels—early childhood, elementary,

middle, secondary or adult learners—and in various settings... (IRA 2000, p. 100)

Since the introduction of the Jamaica Foundation for Lifelong Learning, illiteracy has declined from 47% in 1974 to (Foster, 2006) 21% in 2014(Foster, 2006). In spite of the literacy rate for the Jamaican population, many stakeholders have been complaining about the state of the primary-to-secondary educational system because many students have been found to be illiterate on completion of grade 6 (primary level) and grade 11 (secondary level). Statistics from the Ministry of Education in Jamaica revealed that many 11 and 12 years old Jamaicans have failed English language (Table 5.1), which is equally the same at the eleventh grade level (see Table 5.2)-using Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) in English Language.

Table 5.1.GSAT results in English Language, 2007-2014

Year	% Pass
2007	48.3
2008	52.6
2009	57
2010	58
2011	57
2012	60
2013	62
2014	63

Table 5.2.Subjects subsidized by the Government and the Private Sector

	English
Sitting (2013)	26489
Passing (2013)	16870
% Passing (2013)	63.7
% Passing (2012)	52.0
% Passing (2011)	68.5
% Passing (2010)	70.8
% Passing (2009)	62.8

Source: Caribbean Examination Council, 2013, p. 5

The initiatives and efforts of the Jamaican Ministry of Education (1970) and the National Literacy Board (1974a, 1974b) have resulted in the drastic reduction in the illiteracy rate in Jamaica, which is a long way from what obtains during slavery or early post-Independent Jamaica. In 2013, 64 out of every 100 Jamaican candidate who wrote CSEC English Language (i.e. English A) were successful at the subject and unlike GSAT that is written by all sixth graders, CSEC is taken only by those who are 'ready' based on administrators of secondary schools. When the Ministry of Education and the public indicated that administrators in secondary schools must be held accountable for the high non-functional students who graduate each year, the administrators of the quality of the students they received from the grade six (i.e. GSAT awardees).

In Jamaica all students who write the GSAT examinations are placed in a secondary school (i.e., traditional, newly upgraded high or technical school) and this is based on literacy and numeracy levels. Hence, the lower literate and numerate GSAT candidates are placed in newly upgraded and technical high schools, and this offers an explanation of what is stated by some administrators. Using statistics on those who successfully wrote the GSAT Language Arts, it can be deduced that many students who are placed in non-traditional high school are illiterate sixth graders. Then, the responsibility rests squarely at the feet of the administrators and teachers at these non-traditional high schools to bring them to a level fitting to write the CSEC examination. It should not be surprising that the former Minister of Education, Mr. Andrew Holness, indicated that many of the non-traditional high schools including Holy Trinity, Glengoffe and Marcus Garvey Technical high schools will be used as model institutions in an effort to transform the poor performance of students at these secondary schools (Henry, 2011).

Following on the heels of comments by Andrew Holness, the current Minister of Education (in 2015-Mr. Ronald Thwaites) indicates that schools will carry out a new assessment on seventh graders in an effort to identify the non-functional ones, the responsibility of the schools is to make them literate and numerate before they are brought into the traditional curriculum (Cunningham, 2013). This suggestion was opposed by many administrators in secondary schools because they indicated the already strain on them to meet the existing curriculum. The reality is, there is a literacy deficiency among students at the primary level that is feeding to the secondary level and accounting for the dismayingly low performance of students in CSEC English A.

The researcher is a History teacher at a secondary school in Jamaica who is expected to perform a miracle with the students who are illiterate; and one knows that history comprises of reading. This research comes in handy as it allows the researcher to examine the performance of seventh graders, using their Language Arts scores on the GSAT examination, and the socio-economic background of their parents in order to understand, how to better aid these students. The rationale for my paper is simple, ignorance is not an excuse in the teaching-learning process and to be properly educated is expected of this research. The issue is that teachers in non-traditional high schools are expected to operate with the same curriculum and attain the same standards as those in traditional high school in spite of the clear handicap in students. Hence, with the new mandate of assessing all new seventh graders at secondary school in numeracy and literacy, the researcher believes that this is not the only answer and a part of the solution must come from understanding what influences their performance in both courses in order to make a difference. This study is just an examination of the parental background as well as the attitude

of the students towards school, from which will emerge policy recommendations that will be employed to address the Language Deficiency of new entrants.

Objective 1: determine the statistical correlation between the Students' Attitude towards School and Community and Language Arts score for a group of selected Primary School students in Jamaica

There is a general misconception that education must be done within the confined space of a school, university or college. Education is both formal and informal, which means that what happens outside of the formal space can significantly influence formal education space. Simply put the involvement of parents or family at home has an impact on the formal education of a child. The average Language Arts grade for students in this research was $66.1\% \pm 9.2\%$; $64.5\% - 67.6\%$, which indicates that they are the weaker students. Having established that these are weaker students compared to the 70%+ who are placed in traditional high schools, a critical question that must be answered is "What is the level of students' attitude towards school? And, does it make a difference in the performance of the students in Language Arts?"

The general perception of students' attitude towards school was very high (i.e., 76.5 ± 7.5 ; $75.2 - 77.7$; out of a maximum of 94). When the Students' Attitude towards School and Community was disaggregated, it was found that they had stronger feelings towards their school (42.9 ± 6.5 ; $41.8 - 44.0$) than their community (28.4 ± 4.1 ; $27.8 - 29.1$). Now that the premise has been set that these student have a strong attitude towards school; did it influence their performance in GSAT Language Arts? A statistical correlation between the two aforementioned variables revealed no linear or non-linear relationship (i.e. $r_{xy} = 0.073$, $P = 0.383$), which contradicts all the students

reviewed in the literature that showed a positive relationship between students' attitude and academic achievement (Awang, et al., 2013; Mendezabal, 2013; Michelli, 2013; Li, 2012; Farooq, Chaundhry, & Berhanu, 2011; Wegner, Garcia-Santiago, Nishimura, & Hishinuma, 2010; Erdogan, Bayram & Deniz, 2008; Sarwar, 2004; Marks, 1998; Battistich & Horn, 1997). One researcher, Mendezabal (2013), even went as far as to established a mathematical model that speaks to the influence of attitude on academic performance- 1) Achievement = (Motivation x Skill) x Responsive Environment and 2) Performance = Ability x Motivation. The current study contravenes the general findings in the literature on attitude towards schools and community influencing academic performance. In fact, Shann (1999) and West (1985) found a positive statistical correlation between attitude towards school climate and academic performance, which is not supported by the present work. For this work, even when the students' attitude was disaggregated into school and community, it had no effect on academic achievement in GSAT Language Arts.

All the studies in the literature including the work of Mendezabal (2013) revealed a positive statistical correlation between attitude and academic performance (Yu, 2011; Oluwatimilehin & Owoyele, 2012; Crede & Kuncel, 2008). For the current work, the researcher used a sample of students who was from a non-traditional high school, which had relatively low Language Arts scores on the GSAT examination in 2014, which was never examined prior to now. Hence, this research provides insights into the academic achievement of lower performers. The argument hours spent engaged in academic activities at home positively contribute to academic achievement has merit (Maruyama, 2003), which begs the question "Why the students' attitude in school is not influence

their academic achievement in English Language at the seventh grade level?" The answer rests entirely on the psychological state of the people.

With the sampled respondents being low performers many of them would have known this, of low motivation towards excellence in academic and would be attending school because they are told to so do and have not reached the age to voluntarily not attend school. What this research is not privy to are 1) self-esteem of the sampled respondents, 2) the psychology of low achievement, 3) parental involvement, 4) the quality of teaching at the primary level, and 5) reading level of the students. Those issues may hold key answers to the low performance of the students, as clearly the matter has nothing to do with the students' attitude towards school and community. An issue which could be a limitation and provide the present findings is how the sample size was drawn in the first place.

Sample size as it relates to how it is drawn is critical to the type of findings obtained in a research. A non-probability sample, while it provide pertinent information as is the case in qualitative research, it is not generable and care should be taken in interpreting the findings. For this study, a non-probability sample technique was used to collect the data, and therefore this could be a factor in the outcomes (Babbie, 2007; Neuman, 2006; Crotty, 2005). Simply put, the sample size could have accounted for the no statistical association between students' attitude towards school and academic performance, making it a Type II error. Nevertheless, the study provides invaluable insights to the problem of lower academic performers in a non-traditional high school in Jamaica.

Objective 2 Examine the influence of age, gender and the employment status as well as subjective social class of students' parents on

Language Arts score among a selected group of primary school students in Jamaica.

Using a sample of 1,338 Jamaicans, a national probability survey, Powell, Bourne & Waller (2007) found that 39 out of every 100 Jamaicans indicated that their present economic situation was better than 12 months ago; 72 out of every 100 were concerned about the possibility of being unemployed in the coming 12 months and 55 out of every 100 mentioned that the present (at the time) economic situation was bad, with unemployment identified as the third leading national problem (Powell, et al., 2007, 49). So, could the economic situation of the parents be affecting the academic performance of the children?

Nationally, the unemployment rate in Jamaica was 14.9% in 2013 (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2014), which is about the same for the current study (i.e., 14.6%). It means that many of the national socio-economic challenges are also experienced by parents of the sampled respondents. Well, could the unemployment of parents be impacting on the Language Arts scores of students in the sampled population? According to Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom (1993), the socio-economic situation of parents has an influence on the academic achievement of the children, which is concurred by the current study.

However, this research found that the mean score for student whose parents were employed was $66.3\% \pm 9.4\%$ compared to $66.2\% \pm 9.2\%$ for those whose parents were unemployed, with there being no statistical difference between the figure and that these scores were statistical the same.. This means that children with low academic scores in GSAT Language Arts whether their parents are unemployed or employed average performance are the same. Such findings contradicts the literature on the relationship between the

socio-economic status of a student's parents and his/her academic performance (Suleman, Aslam, Shakir, Akhtar, Hussain, & Akhtar, 2012; Suleman, Hussain, Khan, & Zaib-un-Nisa. 2012; Heyneman, 2005). It is easy to see the correlation between jobless of parents and a child's academic performance simply because the parent is unable to afford the required materials and infrastructure to aid the learning process (Levine, 2009; Stevens, et al. 2009).

The question that must be asked here is "Why is the employment status of the parents, not influencing academic achievement of their children?" which is long established in the literature. The answer to this question lies in 1) attitude of the parents, 2) parental involvement in the educational outcome of their children, and 3) attitude of the children towards academics. The sampled students of this study are those from low socio-economic background, which offers much explanation for what is unfolding this research. Other studies have found that students in a low-income school district do not have the home support to promote the importance of academic success (Trusty, 1999; Okpala, Okpala & Smith, 2001), and this is clearly accounting for the poor performance of students in GSAT Language Arts.

One of the assumptions of many studies is that, being employed opens a family to more resources that can be used for education. This reality is not necessarily the case as children in this research their parents are employed; but, the question that is left unanswered is employed in what area, income level and what about the issue of survivability at the cost of education. Clearly, the children in this study are low socio-economic background in which many of their parents would be receiving low wages, they would be living in violent prone communities and those communities would not be conducive to academic achievement. Devine's perspective (1996) aptly describe what

is happening in this research that a "culture of violence prevents learning from taking place in minority communities", which is a handicap for many of the students in this sample. Are the mainstream values the same for the sampled respondents? The results of this study is a clear no and Kelly explains this well that "Thus, schooling outcomes for inner city students demonstrate the failure of institutional efforts to build a foundation for the "mainstream" values seen as lacking in poor communities" (Kelly, 1995). The reality is while education is a way out of poverty and situation of many children in violent prone areas (Edin & Lein 1997), is this internalized by the seventh graders in this study? The answer is no, and therefore explains why the employment status of the parents do not translate into academic achievement among the students of this study. It is the school's environment that will gradually change the mindset of many of these students, and clearly it will not materialize in the seventh grade.

Kozol's perspective (1991) that, "inner city children receive not only a poorer education than the suburban counterparts, but that they also have less hope and less concern about their education and the need for high quality learning" is absolutely untrue as the teachers are schooled by the same system, with the same yardstick of measurement and expectations. The researcher's rationale is embedded in the CSEC outcomes of children who are from inner-city communities in Jamaica. Many of the non-traditional high school in Jamaica are located in violent prone areas, and inspite of the clear handicap to commence with, many of the students effectively compete with those of the traditional high schools in and outside of violent prone areas. In fact, using CSEC results for 2013, 70.6% of those who wrote Visual Arts were successful from ungraded high schools compared to 81.4% of those in traditional high

schools and 89.2% of those in technical high school.

It should be noted here that the seventh graders to upgraded and technical high schools have a handicap to start as they are lowly literate and numerate. Despite this reality, their teachers are able to take them through to achieving successfully passes in Mathematics, English A, French, et cetera.

Wenglinsky (1998) had opened that, "...students of low socioeconomic families have fewer educational opportunities than those from the middle and upper class families. The educational background of the students' families' plays an important role in academic success", which offered the explanation of change in the academic performance of children in this study. On average the academic performance of students who believed that their parents are in the middle class was $72.4\% \pm 4.8\%$ (95%CI: 71.2-73.5) compared to $58.4\% \pm 7.2\%$ (95%CI: 56.7-60.2) for those in the lower class. Using Independent sample t-test, a statistical significance existed between two aforementioned categories- $t_{108}=13.395$, $P < 0.0001$. This is no difference in the findings by Heyneman (2005); Shever & Walls (1998); Wenglinsky (1998); and Chall (1990) work.

The rationale forwarded by studies in the literature for the difference in performance of students based on the socio-economic background of their parents ranged from having the option and ability to purchase the required instructional resources, ascertain needed assistance, providing the right home environment that is conducive to learning, and parents have a particular value for education. The empirical findings that those of lower socio-economic status performance lower than those in middle-to-upper class families (Heyneman, 2005) is supported by this study, and aforementioned arguments accounts for

this clear 14 per cent points difference in this work.

It is established that there is gender disparity in children's academic performance in language. Gasva & Moyo (2014) found that 55% of the sampled children indicated that gender influences their academic performance in English Language. The rationale for the gender disparity in academic performance is encapsulated in development psychology. Skeggs (2005) forwarded that sex and gender offer explanation for aspects of human behaviour and development, which means that one's biology accounts for differences in academic achievement (CERMI, 2012; Henslin, 2007). Although the gender disparity in academic performance well stated in the literature, the current research disproves the established works as no statistical correlation existed between gender of students and academic performance in language arts.

RECOMMENDATION

The current research has provided insights into the socio-economic characteristics and attitude of students on school and community and how these affect academic performance in language arts among a selected group of primary school students. The recommendations for this study will be three fold: 1) policy, 2) future research, and 3) administration

POLICY

Ministry of Education should organize workshops and training, to better understand the struggles of our students from low socio-economic background and implement strategies to improve their attitude in the learning process. The likely programmes are 1) workshop for parents on their involvement in the learning process of their children; 2) conduct teacher workshops in which they would inform teachers on the way forward from

research perspectives, and 3) conduct in-service training for who are experiencing difficulties transforming the attitude and academic performance of students in Language Arts, particularly those who work in violent prone communities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The non-generalizability of this research, owing to its sampling technique, is a critical reason for the promotion of matter been studied on a national scale. Hence, a future study should remove the present limitations in order to provide generable findings on the phenomenon. Another recommendation is the expand the invested variables to include parental involvement; teacher's involvement; nutrition; self-esteem, cognitive domain, attendance; parental background-occupation, income, educational level-area of school and residence of pupils.

ADMINISTRATION

Generally teachers are not trained in genetic development, conflict management, war tactics, and community surveillance which all have an impact on the academic performance of children. Thus, administrators should conduct preliminary studies on children and provide teachers with this information as well as liaison with parents about their children on a regular basis and provide this as a feedback for teachers in their lesson management.

CONCLUSION

The educational system of Jamaica has been ailing for some time and in spite of the programme employed by the Ministry of Education, Educators and parents; it appears that the answers are yet to be found for the problem. Powell, Bourne & Waller (2007) has provided information that indicated education being the third national problem and this must

be a cause for concern to all stakeholders. Research is critical to the modification and implement of new policies and this one has provided insights that can be used to guide the way forward. It is not sufficient for people to have jobs and believe that this is the answer to change the performance deficiency in the education system. This study has shown that employment status of parents does not contribute to changes in the academic performance of students. However, it is clear from this work that changing the socio-economic status of parents has an impact on the academic achievement of these students. It is within this context that we ask governments and other stakeholders to re-examine income distribution in the society since this holds the key to the under-development of the human capital. Therefore the education of the populace must be looked at from a broader context than the provision of teachers, instructional resources and pedagogical measures to the economics of the family.

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