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Early Childhood Practitioners' Beliefs Regarding Children's Development and Learning Based on the Curriculum

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Karlene DeGrasse-Deslandes

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

Early Childhood Practitioners' Beliefs Regarding Children's Development and Learning

Based on the Curriculum

by

Karlene DeGrasse-Deslandes

MSW, Florida State University, 2001

BA, University of the West Indies, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) is an agency of the Ministry of Education and Youth in Jamaica responsible for early childhood development. It has been proposed that Early Childhood Practitioners (ECPs) should engage in more child friendly and age-appropriate teaching practices. This is especially critical as they use the Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum (JECC). This basic qualitative research was conducted to explore ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning and the influence on the implementation of the JECC. The research questions that guided the study address the beliefs of Jamaican ECPs regarding children's development and learning and the influence of their beliefs on the implementation of the JECC. The conceptual framework based on Pajares's teacher belief theory postulates beliefs as an unobservable construct. Data were collected using semistructured interviews from nine practitioners with a minimum of a Bachelor of Education degree employed full time at an early childhood institution and using the JECC. After transcription the data were analyzed manually to identify emerging codes and the information arranged according to wording similarities. The first set of codes were identified using focused coding and then further categorized based on the most frequent themes and concepts emerging. The study's results confirm that ECPs' beliefs however formed, influence their practice within the learning environment. The findings also revealed that, ECPs believed that their beliefs are in alignment with the curriculum. The adoption of the findings will influence the ECC in implementing strategies to engage ECPs in adequately implementing the curriculum while ensuring developmentally appropriate practices in the learning environment.

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Dedication

I dedicate this PhD to my mother, Thelma Theresa DeGrasse, and my children, David and Janae Deslandes. To my mother, who instilled in me a strong, persevering spirit that has given me the confidence to face challenges with faith, strength, and humility. She has been my reassurance that all things are possible through hard work and the belief in me that I can achieve. To my children, whose early years experiences in preschool fueled my passion to desire and work for the changes needed to improve children's experiences in the early childhood learning environment. I thank God for giving me the wisdom and courage that guided me through each challenging step.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 2000 the early childhood sector of Jamaica underwent an intense restructuring, which focused on achieving optimal overall development for all children between birth and 8 years old (National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development 2008-2013, 2008). In this phase of the restructuring process, the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) was established by an Act of the Jamaican Parliament in 2003 and was given the mandate to ensure the integrated and coordinated delivery of early childhood programs and services (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2014). In executing this mandate, the ECC assists in the preparation of plans and programs geared toward early childhood development, monitors and evaluates the implementation of such plans and programs, as well as acts as a coordinating agency to ensure the effective streamlining of all activities relating to early childhood development (Early Childhood Commission Act of 2003).

Early childhood programs are designed to improve children's overall outcomes through developmentally appropriate practices in the learning environment (Xiong et al., 2020). For example, programs can include early stimulation techniques for children 0–12 months that will create opportunities for the development of their motor, socioemotional, language, and cognitive skills. Early childhood services, such as quality daycare centers, are also aimed at creating healthy, safe and well-maintained environments, with an appropriate number of highly skilled staff who are sensitive and responsive to the needs of the children (Early Childhood Regulations of 2005). Each child's learning is maximized through the practitioner's effective use of time and resources to encourage creative expression that fosters appropriate individual and innovative knowledge and

skills (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2003).

The beliefs of early childhood practitioners (ECPs) and how they influence the implementation of the JECC is an area that, to date, has not been adequately studied in Jamaica. The information from this study is necessary for policymakers to have a clear understanding of how a practitioner's belief system influences the outcomes of early childhood learners to inform how policies regarding teaching and learning environments are created and implemented. The findings also provide opportunities for the ECPs to engage in reflection about their practice in order to aid in their professional development. In this chapter, I present the background of the problem, the problem statement, the significance, and the purpose of the study. I also provide a brief look at the literature on how an ECP's beliefs influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.

Background

In Jamaica, as women increasingly began to join the labor force, there was a growing need for safe and affordable spaces for the care of children, signaling the beginning of formal childcare services organized outside the home. But the services were not organized and had developed in an ad hoc manner to facilitate the growing need for spaces that catered to the care of children. The increased demand for facilities for children ages 3 to 5 changed the early childhood landscape in Jamaica. Schools developed as community basic schools, funded primarily by churches and the communities with very little input from the government.

By the 1960s through the efforts of Dudley Grant, who became known as the "father of early childhood education," the first teacher training program was developed.

Additionally, by 1967, through a project supported by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the first curriculum manual aimed at providing ongoing training for early childhood teachers, was developed. The development of the manual signaled the need for the standardization of early childhood content for teachers. In Jamaica, it was not until 1973 that the first written curriculum was created called the PECE Manual, which stemmed from the early childhood education project (Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum, 2008). By 1976, the first set of Guidelines for Basic Schools was developed and implemented and known as the 3676 Guidelines because it came into effect on June 3, 1976. Enrollment of children in basic schools continued to grow and remains very high today. UNICEF data postulated that in the Latin American and the Caribbean regions, Jamaica has one of the highest levels of pre-primary enrollment for children 3 to 6 years, between 92% and 96%.

Attending basic school in Jamaica became a cultural norm. Over time, the continued increase in demand for pre-primary spaces meant that there had to be a more structured approach to the organization of these programs and services. In 2000, the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) commissioned a strategic review of the early childhood sector. The ECC was then established, signaling the beginning of the reform of the early childhood sector. Its functions include the analysis of the sector's resource needs, identifying alternative financing through negotiations with donor agencies, and advising the Ministry of Education and Youth (MoEY) regarding initiatives (Early Childhood Commission Act of 2003). The development of new regulatory framework facilitated the development and implementation of a new early childhood curriculum in

2008.

Based on these mandates, ECPs must provide early childhood children with opportunities that promote growth across diverse developmental areas, including motor, sensory, communication, and nutritional milestones, which are behavioral and physical checkpoints in children's development. The early years are the most critical period in a child's life as this is when the brain develops most rapidly, and much of the brain's wiring is established (Harris, 2020). A child's language, socioemotional, cognitive, and regulatory skills are developed during this time, and if exposed to quality early childhood programs and services children can obtain their full potential (Harris, 2020). An early childhood curriculum responds to young children's development needs and integrates their learning and development (Loizou, 2018). The development of an early childhood curriculum is influenced by philosophers such as Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Steiner (Saracho & Evans, 2021). These philosophers highlighted that early childhood curricula should meet the needs of the individual child. Further, a high-quality curriculum is needed to influence teachers' beliefs and guide their practices (Quigley, 2021). Teachers' beliefs about how children learn will influence the design of the classroom and practices within that learning environment.

Beliefs form a major influencing factor when assessing educational outcomes. A number of factors influence learning in the teaching and learning environment, and among these factors are the beliefs that teachers hold about the learning environment and how children learn (Dos Santos, 2019). Teachers' beliefs shape their decisions in the learning environment, including decisions about their teaching methods such as lesson

planning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Understanding teachers' beliefs are complex to define because of the way the curriculum is understood and implemented (Gao & Zhou, 2021). Pajares (1992) posited the teachers' beliefs are "unobservable constructs;" however, they can be understood by four constructs: existential presumption, alternativity, affective and evaluative loading, and episodic structure (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). There are also five main categories of teachers' beliefs: (a) learners and learning, (b) teaching, (c) curriculum, (d) learning to teach, and (e) themselves and the nature of teaching (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

In order to support teachers in improving their classroom practices, it is necessary to review both the internal and external factors that create their beliefs, understand how they view their beliefs, and the influence these beliefs have on their practices in the classroom. Teachers' beliefs are influenced by many factors, including persons with whom they interact, different events in their lives, and their experiences and encounters (Buehl & Beck, 2014; Gao & Zhou, 2021). There is a correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices, and various factors within that relationship determine the influence teachers' beliefs have on their practices in the learning environment (Buehl & Beck, 2014). If teachers had a greater understanding of their beliefs, this would translate to changes in practices within the learning environment. Therefore, teachers within the learning environment will likely choose activities that they are confident in conducting based on their beliefs. It is also evident from the research that some beliefs may change and be replaced, while other beliefs, depending on how they are linked and how deeply ingrained, they are unchangeable.

This study aims to explore beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the curriculum. In exploring the literature there was an abundance of information on why having a curriculum is critical in the early years, how to implement an early years' curriculum, and designing an early years' curriculum. There was also substantial research on teachers' beliefs, from which it is evident that there are beliefs that teachers hold that influence what they do within the learning environment. However, there was an absence of locally data collected connecting beliefs with the curriculum implementation. This study addressed the current knowledge gap regarding creating a greater understanding of how ECPs' beliefs in children's development and learning influence and shape their implementation of the curriculum in Jamaica.

Problem Statement

This basic qualitative study adds to the understanding of how ECPs' beliefs influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. An appropriate curriculum is essential because it provides the guide for the teaching and learning process. According to the NAEYC (2023), a proper early childhood curriculum is structured to describe the developmental milestones and skills children are expected to learn and develop. A well-articulated early childhood curriculum provides a foundation for all learners. It allows ECPs the platform to provide early childhood children with experiences that promote learning and growth across diverse developmental areas (NAEYC, 2003). However, implementation data from the 2010 consultancy for the first review of the JECC indicated that while the curriculum was now well-designed, ECPs needed to be more engaged in appropriate teaching practices or use of the curriculum,

and implementation was more practitioner-centered than child-centered (O'Sullivan, 2010).

Researchers have investigated the implementation of the curriculum, but the issue of teachers' beliefs in implementing the national curriculum within the early childhood sector has yet to be explored in Jamaica. Though research has noted that there is a correlation between teachers' beliefs and how they practice (Hustedt et al., 2018), there is a significant gap in the research literature on understanding how ECPs' beliefs regarding how children develop and learn influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in Jamaica. Most of the information found resides offline in institutional reports and online in global reports by non-governmental and donor agencies. These sources provide factual reports on establishments and statistics rather than qualitative research areas such as ECPs' beliefs and how the curriculum is implemented. In attempting to understand this alignment, the following factors are considered: (a) the teacher's educational level attained, (b) specialized training that the teacher received, and (c) individuals who are employed in settings that have policies that support their particular beliefs. This study was conducted to better understand teachers' beliefs on the implementation of the early childhood curriculum and how do these beliefs influence practice, which may improve practices in the early childhood environment.

Purpose of the Study

This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore practitioners' beliefs regarding children's development and learning and how these beliefs influence their implementation of the early childhood curriculum. Another goal was identifying whether

these beliefs are intrinsic or extrinsic. Additionally, it was important to investigate if their beliefs were developed from an existential presumption, alternativity perspective, an affective and evaluative loading perspective, or from the perspective of an episodic structure. The information about the implications of practitioners' beliefs regarding classroom practice can assist practitioners in preparing the learning environment and informing interaction with the children.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the beliefs of ECPs regarding children's development and learning?
2. How do ECPs view the influence of their beliefs on their implementation of the JECC?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study is based on Pajares' (1992) teachers' beliefs theory. This theory refers to belief as "unobservable constructs" that influence how individuals behave. The theory is grounded in the argument that beliefs are indicators signifying how individuals interpret tasks and how their experiences influence their execution of those tasks. Pajares articulated that beliefs are sometimes viewed as "attitudes, values, judgment, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, and action strategies" (p. 309), which suggests that while the words are different, they carry the same interpretation. Pajares' theory frames the study, allowing for the exploration of ECPs' beliefs and their influence on what they do in the learning

environment as they implement the curriculum. By exploring their beliefs on how children develop and learn, insight can be gained into the factors influencing how they implement the curriculum to shape children's learning outcomes.

Additionally, the conceptual foundation for the study is further strengthened by Nespor (1987), who articulated that teachers' beliefs are influenced by previous events or interactions, which impacts the perception of subsequent events, as beliefs "reside in episodic memory." Nespor further argued that belief systems tend to be individualistic, and their validity and existence do not require group consensus. One of the issues used as the basis for this study is whether ECPs' beliefs about children's development and learning is particular to the learning environment or the beliefs are specific to the individual practitioner.

Fives and Buehl's (2012) discourse on the complexity of teacher's beliefs also helped explore this concept of teachers' beliefs affecting practice. Fives and Buehl asserted that teachers' beliefs are both explicit and implicit. Explicit includes instances where teachers are aware of their beliefs, and implicit is when they are unaware of the influence the beliefs have on their classroom practices.

A more in-depth analysis of these theories and concepts in the Jamaica early childhood environment is presented in Chapter 2. Based on the conceptual framework for the study, I chose the basic qualitative approach using individual interviews with early childhood practitioners to understand how their beliefs regarding children's development and learning influence their implementation of the JECC.

Nature of the Study

This study used a basic qualitative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), which aligns with the conceptual framework. In this study, I focused on understanding ECPs' beliefs of children's development and learning. Semistructured interviews allowed me to include specific tailored follow-up questions while using a specific interview instrument to guide the interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The semistructured interviews also allowed ECPs to feel comfortable as the interview was similar to conversing with the individual participants. Interview protocols were developed to address the problem and purpose of the study. Through the questions asked, I gained an understanding of practitioners' beliefs regarding how children develop and learn and how these beliefs influence how they implement the curriculum and their classroom practices.

The study participants were ECPs with minimum training in early childhood development at the Bachelor of Education level. My interview sample consisted of nine trained teachers from different types of early childhood institutions (ECIs) across Jamaica. Approximately 2,300 ECIs are operating in Jamaica, classified as public/private, public, and private ECIs, employing approximately 10,000 practitioners. Public/private ECIs are community-owned ECIs, such as basic schools, and are supported by government subsidies. Public ECIs are owned and operated by the government and are called infant schools or, if attached to a primary school, an infant department. Private ECIs are privately owned and are not supported with funding from the Government of Jamaica.

Definitions

Curriculum: An organized framework that delineates the content children are to learn (NAEYC, 2003).

Early childhood development: The period from conception to school entry. It is a unique window of opportunity for children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, which occurs due to the interaction between the environment and the child (Early Childhood Development in the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021).

Early childhood institutions (ECIs): Learning environments that care for four or more children under the age of 6 years for up to 6 hours per day. This includes nurseries, centers, or homes that offer daycare, basic schools, kindergartens, pre-schools, and infant schools (Early Childhood Act, 2005).

Early childhood practitioners (ECPs): In Jamaica, an ECP is a person with a minimum of a level 2 National Vocational Qualification of Jamaica (NVQ-J) and who looks after the mental, socioemotional, physical and educational development of children between the ages of 0–6 years old within ECIS.

Teacher beliefs: Defined as personal constructs that can provide understanding, judgements, and evaluations of teachers' practices (Pajares, 1992). Beliefs cannot be observed or investigated in a way that presents empirical data.

Assumptions

Particularly in qualitative research, certain assumptions are made regarding the conditions in which the data are collected. Whether conscious or subconscious, researchers bring certain philosophical assumptions to their study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). The study required ECPs to share information on their beliefs about children's development and learning, their use of the JECC, how the JECC aligns with their beliefs, and how they influence classroom practice. I assumed that trained ECPs would understand how children develop and learn and the different types of learners. Another assumption was that practitioners were using the JECC to establish the practices within the learning environment. I also assumed that they would be honest in stating if they used the JECC and if the JECC was aligned to their beliefs. The final assumption was that ECPs would be interested in participating in the research study and provide the foundation for gaining insight into the use of the JECC within the learning environment. These assumptions provided the foundation for the collection of relevant and meaningful information to be collected to support the purpose of the data.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the beliefs of ECPs and how these beliefs influence their implementation of the early childhood curriculum. I chose the topic of the study to gain more information on the factors that impede the proper implementation of the curriculum. Based on my interest, I decided to scrutinize the teachers' implementation of the curriculum and gain a further understanding of ensuring positive outcomes for children at the early childhood level.

The research site was a set of public and private ECIs in Jamaica. ECPs were graduates of teacher's colleges and holders of a bachelor's in education or diploma in education and further selected on the following conditions:

1. Currently employed within early childhood sector in Jamaica.

2. Employed at an early childhood institution that has applied to the ECC to be registered.
3. Employed at an ECI with 3 or more years of classroom experience.
4. Actively using the Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum.

Participants in the study were delimited to ECPs teaching in different facility types across the country and were using the JECC. These delimitations were determined by the site selection and the fact that participants had a certain level of qualification and are experienced in the early childhood environment. The research site being services provided to children at the early childhood level limited the scope of this study to practitioners within ECIs. As the focus of the study was practitioners' beliefs, another delimitation was the exclusion of other ECI personnel, including teaching assistants, caregivers, or any other professional within the classroom who were not practitioners. The actual size was then limited to nine respondents due to timeframe and saturation.

The research design and data collection methods influenced the decision to choose from the listing of all ECIs. Consideration was given to the fact that there would be difficulties recruiting participants if the study was limited to one parish or facility type. The delimitations of the participants and site selection limited the transferability of the findings. The issue of transferability was addressed through the inclusion of practitioners from different facility types (e.g., public, private public/private) and from different parts of the island (e.g. rural and urban areas).

Limitations

Limitations relating to research design and methodology exist in all types of

research. In determining the participants, the use of purposeful sampling of practitioners who self-selected to participate created a limitation because the findings represented the beliefs of those who met the criteria for the study. Initially the study was also limited by the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But as ECIs gradually reopened over the next 12–18 months, this limitation was altered.

Another limitation of this study was statements made without facts or research to support the conclusion. In research studies there is a potential for logical fallacies to develop unintentionally. The review of the literature on practitioners' beliefs and the influence of these beliefs on their classroom practices produced the possibility for generalizations regarding how the JECC is being implemented. Teachers' beliefs are not always visible but significantly impact classroom practices as their beliefs influence the decisions and actions of how and what they teach (Fives & Buehl, 2016). It is, therefore, critical to be conscious of the potential for generalization.

In deciding on the methodology for the study, a basic qualitative approach with the use of semistructured interviews as the data collection method was a potential limitation. The vigor of the data collected depended on both truthfulness of the interviewee and skill of the interviewer. Additionally, a potential limitation was how well the participants articulated their beliefs and their comfort with me as the interviewer. I addressed the limitations through the interview protocol developed, and I remained authentic and trustworthy during the interviews, silent at times to allow participants to express in their own words and phrases.

The researcher in qualitative research is an integral part of the design and

therefore must reflect on their experiences and beliefs and how these may influence the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I had one bias that could have influenced the study. Through previous classroom observations and discussions with the persons in the field who assessed classroom practices, I developed the opinion that the JECC was not being used in the learning environment. In designing the interview questions, I had the input of my dissertation committee chair as reviewer. During the development process, I carefully considered the questions being developed and how I would ask the questions bias free. My committee chair and colleagues at the ECC assisted me in reviewing the language to ensure that they were open ended questions. As I conducted the interviews, I kept focused not impose my opinions or judgements and avoided follow-up questions that were potentially biased.

Finally, as I conducted the interviews I considered the possible trust issues, which were a limitation given my position as the executive director of the ECC. Beginning at recruitment, to build trust among practitioners, I was open and forthright with them regarding the nature of my research study. I kept notes to record my feelings and responses to avoid my biases within the research study. This allowed me to express privately my thoughts and ideas as the participants gave their responses. To alleviate their fears of possible repercussions, as part of the interview protocol, I explained to the participants that their names would be removed from all documents stored. Being the executive director of the ECC, I do not directly supervise the day-to-day activities of ECPs in the learning environments, but it was necessary for the participants to understand the nature of the research and the potential for the implementation of JECC.

Significance

The study fills the gap in understanding by focusing on identifying ECPs' beliefs as they implement the curriculum in Jamaica's early childhood learning environment. Consequently, the primary significance of this study is information that can be used to identify and illuminate the gaps in the children's learning outcomes, the need to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented as required, and how beliefs of teachers may influence the degree of implementation. At the ECC, as in-service training programs are developed, there can be a consideration of tailoring these programs to reflect on practitioners' beliefs on children's development and learning and the influences on curriculum implementation practices. The ECC may need to adjust the in-service training of practitioners to obtain the most effective method of implementing the curriculum.

On the local level the proper implementation of the curriculum by practitioners will allow children within the early childhood age cohort to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to be life-long learners. In Jamaica, the effective use of the early childhood curriculum provides the balance of a child-centered/teacher-directed space for children at the early childhood level within their most vulnerable learning phase in preparation for life. On the international level, Jamaica may observe an improvement in the number of adults who will positively contribute to the country's economic growth and development toward the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica, in making "Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business." An efficient early childhood sector would directly impact the first national goal— "Jamaicans are empowered to achieve their fullest potential" under Vision 2030 Jamaica. Educational

skills through the appropriate curriculum delivery will positively influence individual and collective transformation causing positive social change.

Summary

In this basic qualitative study, I explored practitioners' beliefs on children's development and learning and the requirements of the early childhood curriculum in Jamaica. Chapter 1 introduced the problem of practitioners' beliefs, describing a gap in the literature regarding how practitioners' beliefs influence how they implement the curriculum. The chapter included the study problem, purpose, significance, limitations and the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The basic qualitative study was conducted to explore ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the curriculum. The early years are considered the most critical period of childhood in a child's life as this is when the brain develops most rapidly and much of the brain's wiring is established (Harris, 2020). During this time, a child is significantly impacted by positive or negative experiences and relationships, proper nutrition, and health opportunities. Early positive experiences help the brain develop healthily, and negative experiences affect the developing brain in harmful ways (Harris, 2020). Children of poor families, living in low- and middle-income countries, fail to achieve their physical and cognitive potential due to inadequate stimulation, which affects approximately 250 million children under 5 years old (Black et al., 2017). However, there are increased economic returns for disadvantaged families when appropriate early childhood interventions are implemented with a targeted approach (Gertler et al., 2021).

In the case of the Jamaican child, formal early stimulation and learning can happen as early as 3 months old in daycare settings. In these environments, known as brain builder centers (BBCs), which are government owned day care centers, early stimulation is a fundamental part of ensuring a targeted approach to early development of young children. But how the JECC is interpreted and delivered by ECPs is critical to each child's optimal development. The problem explored in this study is the gap in the research in Jamaica concerning ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the JECC and how their beliefs influence implementation of the

early childhood curriculum. A number of factors influence a child's ability to develop and learn in the early childhood learning environment, including teachers' beliefs, professional development, and teaching style (Dos Santos, 2018). Practitioners' beliefs also influence their classroom behavior and contribute to deciding factors in their methodologies to engage children. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs play a crucial role in relation to the quality and content enacted in the learning environment, creating a strong correlation between their beliefs and practices. Despite the scarcity of research in Jamaica addressing the connection between teachers' beliefs and implementation of the early childhood curriculum, teachers' beliefs reflect the strengths and weaknesses of a teaching context, mainly because the teaching strategies, teaching material, and evaluative practices are determined by their beliefs (Pajares, 1992).

This chapter describes the research strategies applied in identifying relevant recent research on practitioners' beliefs regarding children's development and learning and the influence in relation to the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. Following the search strategy is an explanation of the conceptual framework supporting the study and research question development. The following section presents a review of the literature identifying the overarching themes relating to the study: early childhood education, the importance of an early childhood curriculum, teachers' beliefs, factors that influence teachers' beliefs, relationships between belief and practice, and how these beliefs influence how they learn and what they practice. The discussion concludes with identifying how the study provided additional insight to close the gap in knowledge.

Literature Search Strategy

To create context and establish a foundational understanding of what was known in Jamaica about ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the JECC, an extensive literature search was conducted using various strategies. The primary sources of the Walden University Library databases were ERIC, EBSCO, ProQuest, Education Journals, and Academic Search Complete. Another primary educational database used was SAGE. I also searched for articles using the Google Scholar search engine.

The initial key terms used to search these library databases and search engines included *early childhood education, early childhood development, learning styles, teachers' beliefs, children's development, children's learning curriculum, teachers' perceptions, and early childhood development*. Multiple combinations such as *changes in teachers' beliefs, teacher practices, early childhood education and care curriculum, learning styles in early childhood education, teacher efficacy, learning experiences, motivations for teaching, reasons for teachers' beliefs, and factors contributing to teachers' beliefs* were used to locate the relevant research. Most of the initial literature found was based on research conducted outside of Jamaica. The key term *Jamaica* was included in the search to identify local research on early childhood education, curriculum, early childhood development, and teacher beliefs. Additionally, organization websites including NAEYC, UNICEF, the ECC, Jamaica, and the Ministry of Education & Youth (MoEY), Jamaica were reviewed for publications (news articles, reports, books, periodicals) related to early childhood education.

Several research studies on early childhood development and curriculum were found from as far back as 1963 in many countries, including Belize, Asia, Ethiopia, Australia, and Turkey. However, most of the articles selected for review for this study were published within the past 5 years to reflect more recent and relevant developments and trends in early childhood development. The inclusion of earlier sources represented foundational and seminal works relevant to providing the framework for the discussions in this paper. For example, a 1997 seminal work of Dr. Rose Davies, one of Jamaica's leading early childhood education specialists, was referenced to review the development of early childhood care and education in the Caribbean from the 1950s to the 1980s. Davies was among the first scholars to write about early childhood development in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Other seminal works that cover the conceptual framework of Pajares (1992) as well as contextualize teachers' beliefs include Clandinin and Connelly (1987) and Nespor (1987). Other exceptions included writings done in Jamaica that highlighted the development of an early childhood curriculum and the work that led to the development of the current JECC. This served to document the development of the early childhood sector in Jamaica and the resulting need to formalize and standardize an early childhood curriculum and appropriate teacher training in Jamaica.

Conceptual Framework

The focus of this basic qualitative study was to explore ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the JECC and the influence of their beliefs on how they implement the JECC. The framework that informed this basic qualitative study includes Pajares's (1992) teachers' belief theory. Pajares articulated four

major factors that contribute a basis for the beliefs that teachers develop: (a) early family experiences, based on family nurturing practices and the lessons taught as essential to a child's development; (b) past school experiences, stemming from teaching practices within the early learning environment and emphasized key skills in their development; (c) educational programs of the teachers' training and the influence of their trainers, contributing to the development of their beliefs; and (d) the teachers' immediate classroom situations or factors within the learning environment (i.e. children learning styles may influence teachers' beliefs).

While these factors offered a guide for this study's discussions and data collection Pajares (1992) does not offer a definition nor measurement of beliefs. Pajares posited that beliefs are concepts that cannot be observed and, as a consequence, are not measurable (e.g., the concept of a person's self-esteem). This challenge of defining beliefs through a process of empirical investigation is also noted by researchers preceding Pajares. Clandinin and Connelly (1987), for example, argued that there needs to be more clarity in defining teachers' beliefs, as it is often confused with knowledge—that is, there is a difficulty in pinpointing where an individual's knowledge ends and where belief begins. Nespor (1987) expanded on this observation, noting that beliefs operate independently of cognitive association and have more robust affective and evaluative components than knowledge. Other literature noted that beliefs are frequently confused with other phenomena such as attitudes, values, judgment, preconceptions, internal mental processes, perspectives, and social strategy. Regardless, based on Pajares, teachers' beliefs are examined across the four factors of their early family experiences, their past

school experiences, their teacher education program, and their current immediate classroom situations.

Further to establishing teachers' beliefs, the study explored these beliefs in relation to the ECPs application of the JECC. How a teacher interacts within the learning environment is influenced by their beliefs about how children learn (Quigley, 2021). The beliefs that teachers have about how children learn influences what teachers teach in the learning environment (Wang et al., 2020). Thus, teachers must be led to understand the influences that impact their practices in the learning environment. Helping teachers understand their beliefs will contribute to their improved functioning and may cause them to reflect on their practices to ensure that they meet the needs of the different types of learners (Sah & Shah, 2020).

Pajares' (1992) theory and related literature frame the study in a way that allowed for the exploration of the impact of teacher's beliefs relating to how children learn and develop in classroom practices. Teachers' belief theory facilitates the discussion toward a better understanding of how beliefs develop and their impact on classroom practice. In answering the research questions, the theory created the framework to better understand how beliefs affect the practices in the learning environment. In understanding teachers' beliefs, appropriate in-service programs can be developed to guide developmentally appropriate practices in Jamaica's early childhood learning environment. Additionally, this understanding will guide practitioners' professional development, creating improved personal experiences and resulting in increased practitioner effectiveness and a possible change in the school culture of ECIs.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized around the themes that were developed. Early childhood education is explained and the importance of a quality learning environment with an age-appropriate curriculum is further expanded. Essential to this process are practitioners appropriately implementing the curriculum and allowing children to realize their full potential. Teachers' beliefs, factors that influence teachers' beliefs, and the relationship between belief and practice are then discussed as critical factors in early childhood education and the design and implementation of appropriate curricula.

Early Childhood Education

According to child development experts, the early years, between birth and age 5, are considered a “critical period for developing the foundations of thinking, behaving and emotional well-being” (Bakken et al., 2017, p. 255). A child's language, socioemotional, cognitive, and regulatory skills are developed during this time. If exposed to quality early childhood programs and services, children can obtain their full potential (Harris, 2020). In the last few years, the research indicates that most early childhood programs positively impact young children. High-quality early childhood education programs have significantly increased the potential of poor children and families from low-medium income countries (Black et al., 2017).

In Jamaica, the last 40 years have seen significant changes within the early childhood sector, including the establishment in 2003 of a regulatory body aimed at improving the monitoring of the sector (Early Childhood Commission Act, 2003). The ECC was established by an act of Parliament, the Early Childhood Commission Act of

2003, creating a legal structure to regulate and monitor all early childhood programs and services. Teachers must clearly understand the knowledge they access, as they make decisions in the learning environment (Blewitt et al., 2021).

The history of early childhood education dates back to the 1950s, with significant contributions from many of the great child development theorists. In Jamaica, as industrialization expanded, new job opportunities were created for women, resulting in the increased need for childcare services outside the home. The increased demand for these facilities was met by private individuals, benevolent societies, and the church, and in 1938, the first community basic school was opened in Jamaica in Islington St Mary, with the opening of this play center, the basic school movement in Jamaica began. Over the years, schools were established across the country through the efforts of communities and churches (Jones et al., 2011). In 1967, supported by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Mr. Dudley Ransford Grant, initiated the Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE) (Jones et al., 2011). In the 1930s, Jamaica was one of the few countries in the Caribbean region, that had provisions for preschool education for children 3 to 6 years that did not rely on any government or state organization.

In the 1940s, early childhood advocates lobbied for the government to have an input in the expanding sector and in 1950, the Ministry of Education appointed the first supervisor for Infant Schools. By the 1960s, the first teacher training program for caregivers was developed to address the concerns regarding quality. In 1976, the first document of guidelines for operations of early childhood centers was developed. As the government's interest grew and the early childhood program expanded in 1972 the Early

Childhood Unit (ECU) was established to facilitate the training of teachers and the registration of pre-schools. By 2003, the government articulated the increasing importance being placed on early childhood education and established the ECC.

Importance of Early Childhood Curricula

An early childhood curriculum responds to young children's developmental needs, while integrating their learning needs (Loizou, 2018). Saracho and Evans (2021) articulated that educational pioneers believed that educational practices must be executed practically, assisting children to develop and function efficaciously. The development of an early childhood curriculum was influenced by philosophers such as Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Steiner (Saracho & Evans, 2021). The philosophies proposed highlighted that early childhood curricula should meet the needs of the individual child.

Whether labeled "learning framework" or "curricula", Melvin et al. (2020), suggest that an early childhood curriculum must have specific components. The authors recommend the following areas: "(1) beliefs and goals about learning and development; (2) learning experiences, including what and how children learn; (3) teaching strategies, including approaches to provide learning experiences; and (4) specific materials and resources that help teachers and children achieve those goals, including lessons plans, schedules, or classroom arrangements" (p.11). As suggested by Escayg and Kinhead-Clark (2018), the early childhood curriculum generally follows the philosophical context skewed towards American and European theorists such as Bruner, Piaget, Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky and Montessori. It involves prearranged activities geared

towards specific outcomes and spontaneous activities that are child-directed. The early childhood curriculum provides ECPs with a guide to developing the daily activities executed within the learning environment. Children are, therefore, engaged in meaningful activities, allowing their development and learning aligned to the developmental milestones as posited by the child development theorists.

In 1973, the first written curriculum, PECE Manual, was developed in Jamaica (Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum, 2008). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), put forward the organization's initial position on the definition of a curriculum. Developed in 2003, the definition spoke to the need for the curriculum to promote positive child outcomes. The organization further articulated that the curriculum should be deliberate in meeting children's needs, developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, challenging, comprehensive, and responsive to the linguistic needs of the different types of learners. The JECC followed this contextual framework and aimed at facilitating positive outcomes for all children. The beliefs affirmed in the JECC mirrored that of the NAEYC, asserting that if an appropriate environment was created and children were exposed to positive experiences and age-appropriate stimulation they would attain their full potential (Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum, 2008). It was the belief that without a high-quality curriculum to guide teachers' beliefs and practices children's development would be stunted.

Teachers' Beliefs

While the literature is clear that teachers' beliefs are essential in allowing an understanding of practice, there is no definition of teachers' beliefs. There are many

theories and methodologies, including defining teachers' beliefs as experienced-based knowledge (Boubris & Haddam, 2020) or attitudes, judgment, values, and opinions (Fives & Buehl, 2014; Gao & Zhou, 2021; Hubris & Haddam, 2020; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). It is also evident from the literature that there is a positive relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. Quigley (2021) states that teachers' beliefs regarding how children learn guide the practices in the learning environment and impact how the environment is designed for the optimal child involvement. Researchers agree that beliefs develop over time, based on a teachers' own learning and experience, and have more impact on influencing practices in the learning environment than a teacher's knowledge.

According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017), teachers' beliefs shape their decisions, including their decisions about teaching methods. Gilakjani and Sabouri define beliefs as an individuals' interpretation of the world based on their evaluations and judgements. As such, beliefs are integral to a teachers' classroom practices and professional development. Beliefs have a more significant impact on teachers' practices in areas such as lesson planning, and as they gain content knowledge. Gilakjani and Sabouri proposes five main categories of teachers' beliefs (1) learners and learning, (2) teaching, (3) curriculum, (4) learning to teach, and (5) themselves and the nature of teaching.

Fives and Beuhl (2012) further articulate that teachers' beliefs are both implicit and explicit. Implicit beliefs are developed through previous experiences created without the individual's awareness of their formation and are attached to their judgements

regarding a particular issue or phenomenon. They are unconsciously formed and are unknown to the individual. Teachers form beliefs regarding classroom practices based on their training as teachers that manifest as they function in the learning environment. Explicit beliefs, are deliberately formed. An example, if teachers believe that the children are kinesthetic learners then the learning environment will be arranged based on that belief. However, these beliefs are understandings that are held by teachers as accurate and form a part of their theory on teaching and learning (Gavora & Wiegerova, 2019). The practices in the learning environment will reflect the beliefs teachers' hold regarding how children learn. The resources used will also evidence these beliefs. A teacher who believes that children learn in a particular way, will choose activities that aligned with their beliefs. Fives and Beuhl also indicate that teachers' beliefs change over time, as some beliefs are grounded in a context or a situation that causes the belief to change when the context changes. Beliefs developed during teacher training may change as a teacher becomes more experienced and interacts directly with the students and the external environment.

Identifying the gap in the research pertaining to a teachers' motivation in making the decision in the learning environment, AlAbri et al. (2022) argues that a teachers' previous learning experiences shape their beliefs and influences the decisions they formulate while teaching. This view, endorsed by Berger et al. (2018), posits that while there is limited evidence of a teachers' motivation to adopt teaching practices in the classroom, research has increasingly shown that there is a relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices in the learning environment. In presenting an opposing

view Viswanathan (2019) states that there is some validity in all the arguments being advanced by researchers on both sides of the discussion regarding teachers' beliefs influencing their practices in the learning environment. Teaching and learning do not occur in a vacuum. Factors such as the community, students, and the school environment may affect the teachers' ability to practice in alignment with their beliefs (Viswanathan, 2019). As aptly described by Dos Santos (2018), there are several factors that influence learning in the teaching and learning environment, and among these factors are the beliefs that teachers hold about the learning environment and how children learn. Dos Santos links teachers' beliefs to practices, stating that explicit nature of teachers' beliefs allows for the understanding of their practices in the learning environment.

Factors that Influence Teachers' Belief

Teachers' beliefs are influenced by many factors including persons with whom they interact, different events in their lives, and their experiences and encounters (Buel & Beck, 2014; Ha & Murray, 2021; Nirwanto et al., 2021). Described by Pajares (1992) in his seminal work, teacher's beliefs are formed early and continue over time. Pajares also indicated that these beliefs may not be logically constructed and persists even after a teacher's knowledge and experience increases. The concept was brought out in the interviews as participants explained how they developed their love for teaching young children. In understanding the nature and the sources of teachers' beliefs will allow for an appreciation of the choices made regarding practice.

Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) postulate teachers' beliefs about education are influenced by the pedagogy and content of their training as teachers. The view shared by

Gilakjani and Sabouri also indicates that teachers' learning experiences shape their beliefs about education in general. The view was also endorsed by Levin (2014), whose research also indicate that external factors, such as a teacher's learning experiences influence classroom practices. In the research that examines the development of teachers' beliefs, Levin agrees that internal and external factors influence teachers' beliefs. Based on their research, the external factors included their interactions beyond their students and included their professional learning communities.

Buehl and Beck (2014) posited that internal and external factors influence teachers' beliefs, concluding that their beliefs remain stable and consistent over time. The internal factors include other beliefs, the teacher's confidence in their content knowledge and skill, and the teacher's awareness of their ability to appropriately execute the curriculum, while the external factors include: the teacher's training, classroom dynamics, and other factors within the school community and additional relating to the policies and standards that govern teaching. Ha and Murray (2021), also concluded that teacher's beliefs are affected by the nature of their teaching experiences. According to the authors, teacher's beliefs are based on their own educational experiences and may change over time as they engage in professional development programs. Nirwanto et al. (2021) state that beliefs occur for different persons in different ways depending on their discipline and the context within which they operate. Consequently, teachers operate in the learning environment based on their knowledge, which gives them confidence and other affective influences, including their personal interests, attitudes, and beliefs.

A teacher's self-confidence influences the beliefs they bring to the learning

environment (Quigley, 2021). ECPs confidence in their knowledge will function in the learning environment with confidence and develop daily activity plans that are child-centered and promote exploration and discovery.

Teachers' beliefs can be understood as shaping who they are as individuals and ultimately contribute to the decisions made in the learning environment. Teachers' beliefs will change after realizing that what they believed about children's learning, the school environment, their knowledge of the content area being taught, and other teachers, may not be accurate (Bhuel & Beck, 2014). These beliefs will change based on their involvement in professional development workshops, participation in educational training programs and changes in school policies. For example, ECPs having attended the Annual Professional Development Institute (PDI) hosted by the ECC, have indicated that they have used the information gained to enhance their classroom practices. Beliefs regarding using play as a tool to enhance learning has changed with ECPs attending the ECC's re-imagining play series. The series was developed as a response to changing practitioners view of play within the learning environment. Based on their research, Boubris and Haddam, (2020) stated that teachers have established beliefs reflected in their practices, and their interactions shape their instruction within the learning environment.

Relationship Between Beliefs and Practice

According to Buehl and Beck (2014), teachers have beliefs about all aspects of their teaching and how children develop within the learning environment. Teachers' beliefs relate to their knowledge and that of the children they teach, and about their practices within the learning environment. The authors opine that if teachers had a greater

understanding of their beliefs, this would translate to changes in practices within the learning environment. Therefore, teachers within the learning environment will likely choose activities that they are confident in conducting, based on their beliefs. This confidence is based on their belief in their knowledge of the content and how children learn (Quigley, 2021). For example, in their study regarding teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching listening, Sah and Shah (2020) conclude that teachers believe that the children lack the vocabulary to support their learning listening comprehension adequately. As a result, the practices within the learning environment echoed these beliefs and the children were taught through direct instruction and drills.

Additionally, how strong or important a specific belief may influence how that teacher collaborates with peers (Buehl & Beck, 2014). These authors suggest that external factors such as the culture of their working environment, the school, and the nature of the community may also influence how teachers collaborate with other teachers. Buehl and Beck agreed that there is a correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices, and various factors within that relationship determine the influence teachers' beliefs have on their practices in the learning environment. There are internal factors, events that are within the teacher's control and external factors, those that are outside of the teacher's control. The internal factors relate to the other beliefs that the teachers possess: their knowledge of the content they are teaching, how aware they are of themselves and having these beliefs, and the processes they use to reflect on their practice. Additionally, the external factors include the classroom environment, to some extent the resources available, the school and the leadership that guides the practices in the school, and the

policies and programs that exist on a national level.

Summary and Conclusions

In exploring the research on teacher's beliefs, it is evident that there are beliefs that teachers hold that influence what they do within the learning environment. Depending on how important they are to the teacher, these factors influence their practices. It is evident from the research that some beliefs may change and be replaced by other beliefs depending on how they are linked or how deeply ingrained the beliefs are within the individual. In order to assist teachers in improving their practices, it is necessary to review the internal and external factors that influence teachers' beliefs. Based on how some beliefs are formulated and how long some teachers held them, it is imperative that as we review practice, we are able to understand the impact of teachers' beliefs. Understanding teachers' beliefs will guide the training conducted by the ECC with ECPs, with the hope that, over time, these beliefs will change through involvement in professional development workshops. The outcomes of this research study may be used to guide future professional development programs within the early childhood sector in Jamaica. With a better understanding of the depth of teachers' beliefs and the influence on practice, training sessions can be targeted to guide practitioners to know and create developmentally appropriate practice.

Chapter 2 represents the outcome of the literature review concerning ECPs beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to JECC. The chapter first contextualizes early childhood education and the importance of early childhood curricula before synthesizing the research conducted to explore the impact practitioners' beliefs

have on their classroom practices. The primary focus of this synthesis begins with the exploring of definitions of and factors that affect teachers' beliefs before exploring the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore the influence of ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the implementation of the JECC. In this chapter, there is an examination of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, the procedures for recruitment, participation and data collection, and trustworthiness, which includes the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

In exploring ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning in relation to the JECC, the research questions that guided the study were:

- RQ 1: What are the beliefs of ECPs regarding children's development and learning?
- RQ 2: How do ECPs' beliefs influence the implementation of the Jamaica early childhood curriculum?

These questions were answered by employing a basic qualitative research design.

Qualitative research is naturally objective, allowing the phenomenon being studied to be explored in its natural environment (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A quantitative approach could not have been used because the purpose of the study was not to quantify data or explore the relationships between variables to generate numerical data (Borgstede & Scholz, 2021). Using a qualitative approach permitted me to gain practical knowledge of the circumstances that allow for the exploration of teachers' beliefs and the impact on implementing the curriculum.

Qualitative researchers have a variety of methods from which to choose, including ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. An ethnographic study is used to examine culture or a social group (Sharma & Sarkar, 2019), and while beliefs may have cultural aspects, the primary intention was not to look at the cultural differences of the practitioners. Another area of qualitative research considered was phenomenology, which is based on lived experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The premise of the study was that there was not one single shared belief and that beliefs are created from multiple sources, eliminating phenomenology as the research method. Finally, the case study was reviewed to ascertain its relevance to the current study. This method was discarded as the proposed research questions were not created to explain a social phenomenon or answer how, or why practitioners' beliefs impact the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in Jamaica (Yin, 2017). Instead, the study explored practitioners' existing beliefs about children's development and learning and their impact on their practices in the learning environment. Consequently, the basic qualitative design using semistructured interviews was chosen as the foremost method for this study. The aim was not to solve a problem, but to generate a detailed account of individual beliefs and practices, identifying common experiences and belief systems that impact how the curriculum was being implemented in early childhood learning environments in Jamaica.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's primary role in the process was that of an observer, because as the practitioner interviews were being conducted, I was collecting responses from the participants but not contributing responses. I have been at the ECC in Jamaica for 20

years. The first 4 years I was the regulation and monitoring coordinator. In 2008, based on the development of the first National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development, the post was upgraded to director of regulation and monitoring. Since 2016 I have assumed the roles and responsibilities of executive director of the ECC. Over the years I have conducted many ECI visits and observed practitioners/child interactions in the learning environment. My observations led to several discussions with ECC's training manager based on concerns regarding the implementation of the JECC, which highlighted that there were deviations in how the curriculum was being implemented. Based on observations, implementation fidelity was absent in learning environments where practitioners implemented in ways that aligned with their beliefs. It was believed that in some early childhood settings practitioners were not following the curriculum. In other settings it was felt that it was not the primary source for the development of the daily activities, but was combined curricula, making it more effective. Questions were also asked relating to the effectiveness of the weekly curriculum sessions conducted by the ECC. These sessions were aimed at supporting the ECPs as they implemented the JECC. The curriculum support session seems not to be effective as they did not address the challenges of implementation.

Because of my experience, it was important to ensure that my research biases did not filter into the study. Biases and assumptions can affect how data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As researchers conduct interviews with study participants, they should be aware of the influences of their own experiences and biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the study progressed and the data

was being collected, I ensured that my follow-on questions were not based on any biases. This was accomplished by noting my thoughts, feelings, and ideas during and after each interview. The journal allowed for reflecting which was critical in building trust with the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). During the coding of the interviews, the notes taken and the review of each interview transcript allowed the separation of my biases. Member checking was another tool used, allowing participants to review the interpretation of their responses to the interview questions. Allowing the participants to review the conclusions drawn, ensured that my interpretation represented their thoughts and ideas, not my biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Methodology

The research problem that was addressed in this basic qualitative research was the need for an understanding of how ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning influence their implementation of JECC. Participation in the study were voluntary and were selected through purposive sampling from a population of practitioners with a Bachelor of Education from both public and private ECIs in Jamaica. Using the list of ECIs in Jamaica, 20 ECIs were identified, and the invitation of participation letter was sent via email. Being Executive Director at the ECC, using the Zoom platform allowed practitioners not to be exposed to negative reactions from colleagues for participating in the study. Due to the time frame and saturation the interview sample size consisted of 9 trained ECPs from different types of ECIs across Jamaica. In a qualitative study, saturation is the desired outcome for data collection as the objective is to gather enough information to develop the model (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Similarly, Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggest that saturation is reached when no new information is being coded and the interview information is redundant. Based on data collected and coded from the first set of interviews, saturation was reached.

Instrumentation

Practitioners, as other professionals are motivated by their beliefs. Beliefs, as posited by Pajares (1992), exist in relation to their work, their students, the subject content they share, how children learn, in addition to their roles and responsibilities within the learning environment. The interview protocol was developed based on the conceptual framework aligned with the research questions and designed to elicit meaningful data pertaining teachers' beliefs (Fives & Beuhl, 2012). The interview protocol also elicited how their beliefs influence their practices and understanding of content (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

As researcher, the interview process was intended to build trust with the participants. In each interview protocol there was an explanation of how the data would be conducted, used, verified and kept confidential. After each interview, I reiterated the purpose of the study, and explained how the information would be used and reassured participants that the information was kept confidential. I explained that the data would be used to enhance the early childhood development (ECD) sector and influence curriculum implementation practices. This allowed the participants to feel valued, and their opinions respected.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The first step in the recruitment process involved requesting and receiving the

approval from the ECC's Board Chairman to acquire the list of early childhood institutions (ECIs) in Jamaica. The Chairman's approval response along with the relevant documents were then submitted for Walden University's IRB approval. After IRB's approval, ECIs were selected and the practitioners of the selected ECIs contacted and informed of the study.

There are approximately 8,000 practitioners employed in approximately 2,431 ECIs operating across Jamaica. Based on the informal nature of the genesis of Jamaica's early childhood sector, it was important to ensure that the practitioners selected were qualified to answer the interview questions. The sample selected was based on the following criteria:

1. Practitioners 21 years or older.
2. Practitioners with at least three years working in an early childhood learning environment.
3. Early Childhood Institutions (ECIs) that comply with the Early Childhood Act and Regulations, 2005 or having a minimum of a Permit to Operate.
4. Practitioners in full-time employment at the ECIs.
5. Practitioners with minimum qualification of a Bachelor's Degree in early childhood development from an accredited teacher training institution.
6. Practitioners who are currently using the JECC.
7. Practitioners who have received at least one classroom observation visit from an ECC trained Development Officer within the last 12 months with a score of over 70%.

The participants selected were sent invitation letters explaining the study, and the consent forms to indicate their willingness to participate. The first 9 practitioners who responded to the request were interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded, notes taken, and a journal kept. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 - 70 minutes depending on the need for follow-up questions. The data was collected via semistructured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

In the first step of the data analysis process, the notes and audio recordings were reviewed before the transcription of the audio recordings began. After transcription, the participants were provided with a copy of the information to verify its accuracy. The next step focused on coding the interviews to identify codes and arrange the information according to wording similarities (Saldaña, 2016). Preliminary codes began emerging as participants were being interviewed. In my proposal, I stated that I had planned to use the NVivo Code software to identify key phrases as they emerged and then refined the themes. I felt that NVivo Code would allow for a better manipulation of the data (Saldaña, 2016). As I listened to the recordings and read my notes several times, I began coding manually and concluded that manual coding was not only easier and gave me a better understanding of the data. After identifying the first set of codes using focused coding (Saldaña, 2016), the data was further categorized based on the most frequent or significant themes or concepts emerging. During this second phase, the codes that emerged from the interviews were closely examined and the connection to the categories that corresponded to the research questions highlighted. This allowed further

categorization of the initial codes based on similar themes and concepts ensuring the validity of the data collected (Saldaña, 2016).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to ensure that the research is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. Ravitch and Carl (2016) opine trustworthiness is achieved through triangulation, audit trails, peer debriefing, prolonged field observation, member checking and identifying researcher bias. Further, Creswell and Poth (2017) posit that qualitative researchers should use at least 2 validation strategies. In establishing trustworthiness, the methods used, were member checking, audit trail, peer debriefing and identifying researcher bias. In data collection aspect of the study, all aspect of the research process was documented, and a record was kept of the issues and challenges that arose. After transcribing the interviews, participants were sent the transcripts to review the information to ensure that their thoughts and ideas were accurately represented. I kept notes to ensure that my ideas were not a part of the data collected.

Credibility

Through member checking a researcher's findings and interpretation were verified for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To establish credibility, participants reviewed the transcripts of the interpretation of their responses to ensure their thoughts and experiences were accurately captured (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Participants were given time to respond and were again reassured that their information would be kept confidential. I also explained to the participants that their verification of te information

was a critical feature of qualitative research. Participants indicated their understanding of the process and later agreed that the transcriptions were accurate.

Transferability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), in qualitative research, transferability refers to applying one set of research findings to another study involving similar settings and individuals, such as, exploring the beliefs of practitioners in training. As the study was conducted, detailed information was kept of the process so that other researchers are able to apply the processes and findings to develop future research areas. The questions were original questions and not taken from an existing set of questions from other studies. This provides a springboard from which future research questions can be developed. To further assist future research studies, included was an audit trail which provided a detailed description of the literature supporting the study, the process, and the participants.

Dependability

Dependability means that the results of the study regarding practitioners' beliefs will remain stable over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), allowing the study to be repeated. Through the coding and re-coding processes dependability was achieved. Another way in which I achieved dependability was by having the codes reviewed by another expert in the field. The additional methods used to ensure the dependability of the study were member checking with the participant ECPs, keeping notes, and getting feedback from my peers and my dissertation committee chair. Finally, an audit trail was used describing the steps taken from the start of the research study to the development and reporting of

findings.

Confirmability

It was hard sometimes to hide my passion about the implementation of the JECC and how this affects child outcomes. In the study to data findings were not due to the biases of the research or participants, confirmability was established by keeping a journal to document my feelings during the study. In my notes I also documented the ideas and feelings of participants expressed as they responded to the follow-up questions. This ensured that my personal views and those of the participants did not overshadow data collection and data analysis. The audit trail documenting the processes and following the processes documented ensured confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

The guidelines established by Walden University for the ethical treatment of human subjects were followed as the study was conducted. After receiving approval from the University, informed consent was requested and granted from the participants. Participation was voluntary and participants were purposively selected from te of ECIs in Jamaica. Interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform which was convenient for participants and at the time they suggested. At the start of the interviews, I explained the purpose of the study to each participant and that their information would be kept confidential. Participants were sent the transcripts to review so that they were satisfied with my interpretation and conclusions of the interviews. In further establishing confidentiality and trust, I explained to the participants that codes would be used to maintain confidentiality instead of their actual names and the names of their ECIs. My

personal computer which is password protected, was used, and the information stored on a flash drive bought and used exclusively for the study. My notes, where necessary, were scanned and saved in the same way, being accessible only to me. I intend to destroy the flash drive 5 years after the study's completion date and the data will remain confidential and safeguarded.

Summary

The research conducted was a basic qualitative study using one-on-one interviews of 9 ECPs. The data was collected using semistructured interviews allowing for follow-up questions as practitioners' beliefs on how children develop and learn and the influence on how they implement the JEEC were explored. The necessary steps were taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness and that ethical procedures were maintained. Chapter 4 includes the study's results, facilitating a more in-depth discussion on the data collection and analysis strategies used.

Chapter 4: Results

This basic qualitative study explored early childhood practitioners' beliefs about children's development and learning in relation to their implementation of the Jamaica early childhood curriculum. Understanding practitioners' beliefs and the influence these beliefs have on the implementation of curriculum and the resulting classroom practices was paramount to this study and informed the research questions. Data were gathered from individual interviews with nine early childhood practitioners as participants, using semistructured interview questions. Identification numbers were developed to disguise the identity of the individual practitioners, their schools and the schools' location.

This chapter includes an analysis of the data and its alignment with the research questions, the problem, and purpose of the study, viewed through the conceptual framework. Chapter 4 focuses on the results of the study, beginning with a description of the research setting, the demographics of the practitioner participants, the data collection process, and the data analysis. A detailed description is also presented showing evidence of trustworthiness. The themes that emerged during data analysis are presented and aligned with the research questions. The chapter closes with a summary that serves as a segue into Chapter 5.

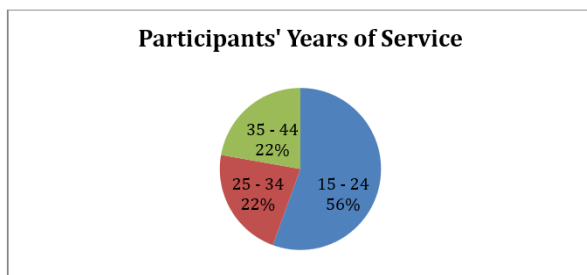
Setting

The research setting included public and private ECIs across Jamaica. The ECPs are graduates of teacher's colleges and holders of a bachelor's of education degree, diploma, or are vocationally trained. The initial contact was via email to acquire their approval to participate in the research study. Practitioners had to be (a) employees within

the early childhood sector in Jamaica, (b) teaching in the field of early childhood education and using the national curriculum, and (c) have at least 3 years of classroom experience at the early childhood level. The data collection relied on the documented list of all 2,367 early childhood institutions and a further selection of 137 potential participants who received the email. The list was reduced to 20 who responded as being interested, then to 18 participants who gave their consent, and then nine who gave a date and time for the interview.

Demographics

The participants were nine practitioners employed at the early childhood level in different institutions across Jamaica. The participants taught in the various types of ECIs (i.e., private, public and public/private) and in different locations ranging from urban to suburban to rural. The total number of years teaching was not included in this study as a possible influence, but it is noted that all the participants taught for more than 15 years (see Figure 1). The study did not consider the practitioners' years of teaching as a factor impacting their beliefs. Instead, other factors that created their beliefs and the impact on curriculum implementation were explored. An area for future research is a comparison study to explore the beliefs of novice practitioners (less than 5 years' experience) and experienced practitioners (more than 15 years). The demographics of the study participants are included in Table 1.

Figure 1*Participants' Years of Experience***Table 1***Participants Demographics*

Teacher Number	Qualification	Years Teaching	Use of JECC
(P-001)	Trained Teacher	24	yes
(P-002)	Trained Teacher	24	yes
(P-003)	Trained Teacher	35	yes
(P-004)	Trained Teacher	20	yes
(P-005)	Trained Teacher	34	yes
(P-006)	Trained Teacher	28	yes
(P-007)	Trained Teacher	16	yes
(P-008)	Trained Teacher	19	yes
(P-009)	Trained Teacher	25	yes

Data Collection

The nine ECPs were interviewed over 2 months. To recruit participants, 137 invitations for participation were sent via email to multiple ECIs. The initial email explained the nature of the study, who I was, and asked if they would like to participate.

E-mails were the sole communication tool used to recruit participants for practitioner interviews from the list of all early childhood institutions in Jamaica. The data collection process took place during July and August of 2023. After registering their interest, the approved consent form was emailed and participants emailed their response, "I consent." The interviews were scheduled based on the availability of each participant and a total nine of the 18 practitioners who responded, "I consent" were interviewed. Participants confirmed their understanding regarding the voluntary nature of their participation and that they could discontinue their involvement without being penalized. At the beginning and closing of each interview, the steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were explained. This included describing that their names would be replaced with a participant number and would not be attached to any data stored. Additionally, the data were stored on a password-protected computer owned by me.

Interviews

The interviews ranged from 45 to 70 minutes, and each followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The study consent form was used to ensure participants eligibility and semi-structured interview questions were used to collect the data. The study proposal had stated a participant pool of eight to 12 practitioners. I received consent emails from 18 and interviewed the nine practitioners who provided an interview date and time. The interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform and were audio recorded. Descript transcription software was used to transcribe the recordings. Using the Zoom platform was an advantage, as people were comfortable in their own spaces and had the option to turn off their cameras. Additionally, since

participants were from across Jamaica, this saved on travel time and cost. Only one participant initially opted to be off camera and then turned on her camera toward the end of the interview. The interview protocols were developed to address the problem and purpose of the study. The data points from these sources used to answer the research questions centered on the beliefs of ECPs and the influence this has had on their practices as they implemented the Jamaica early childhood curriculum.

Data Analysis

My data analysis began by carefully reviewing the transcript and listening to the recordings multiple times. I reviewed the transcripts and made changes to ensure the information was captured accurately. Member checking was used by emailing the transcripts to the participants for their review for inaccuracies in the data, and for clarification of their responses.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze and interpret the interview data. Thematic analysis is a method used to analyze qualitative data, involving identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This data analysis tool is flexible and can be applied to various qualitative data, including observation notes, interview transcripts, and survey responses. The interview questions provided the basis on which themes began to emerge while coding the participants' interviews.

The transcripts from the participants' interviews were uploaded into Descript and then coded. In my proposal, I had indicated that I would use NVivo to code the data. After the first two interviews, I felt more comfortable coding manually and was guided by the committee chair. Before manually coding, the transcripts were again reviewed to

identify meanings. In this first step initial codes were generated. The essential features of the data that were relevant to the research questions were documented. The effectiveness of qualitative data analysis is associated with the coding strategy utilized in the data analysis process (Yin, 2017).

After the codes were established, I used the research questions to categorize into potential themes; these were broader patterns that emerged across the data set. Each theme was then reviewed and refined in the next phase to ensure it accurately represented the coded data and the overall data set. Some identified words and phrases include learning, curiosity, valuing the diversity in learning styles, active learners, hands-on experiences, individual learning styles, blueprint, guide, assessment, different learning needs, routines, parental involvement, external interactions, and teaching strategies. In examining RQ 1 against the interviews, the phrases that emerged were catering to the whole child, diverse learning styles, children grow in stages, education is not static, each child is unique, children's development is a continuous process, children were active learners, children interacting with their environment, learning stages, and children are natural explorers. The phrases that emerged related to RQ 2 include connecting learning with real-life situation, creating an environment that caters to individual needs, integrating disciplines that make learning fun, help children to see the interconnectedness of knowledge, allows the children to express themselves, additional research, other sources of information, supplement the curriculum, and active learning.

The final step involved defining and naming the themes and linking the themes with each other and the research questions (see Saldana, 2016; Appendix B). The

categories were ECPs' beliefs regarding children's development and learning and how early childhood practitioners view the influence of their beliefs on implementing the JECC. Under the first category, data were arranged into themes aligned to the information regarding ECPs' belief that children develop in stages, parents must be active participants in their children's education, the belief that education is not static and that practitioners' beliefs developed from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Under the second category, the data were arranged into themes regarding the JECC as a guide, their beliefs were in alignment with the curriculum and teacher preparedness and classroom resources being critical factors in implementing the JECC. The categories were discussed with my committee chair to ensure that the areas identified were within the scope of the study. After clearly defining and naming each theme, the final step in the analysis review was to document the results, giving an accurate account of the steps taken in the analysis and a description of the determined themes.

During the coding process, I frequently referred to my notes of the thoughts and ideas generated while listening to the responses of the interviewees. A few interviews required greater focus, and caution had to be exercised to guard against the risk of researcher bias. In those sessions, my responses were limited to often rephrasing for clarification. This was to ensure that only the responses of the participants were being documented. Safeguarding against personal opinions in the data collection is a critical process in collecting qualitative data. Listening to the interviews and reviewing the notes supported my objectivity as the data was interpreted. The general codes, categories, and themes identified are listed in Appendix A.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure that the readers can trust the contents of the study, at an early stage I was conscious of the critical importance of the issues relating to the study's trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020). As the research study was conducted, through the development of the study design, data collection and analysis, multiple methods and techniques were integrated to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness within the research study was achieved and maintained and is discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter and evaluated based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In the preparation stages before conducting the interviews, I dealt with credibility by ensuring that the document was reviewed by two of my peers, a qualitative researcher, and my committee chair after developing the interview protocols. During that process, I received feedback on the design of the interview questions, whether the questions were grounded in the literature, and assessing if the questions were open-ended. In addition, data were triangulated using the interviewees, interview notes, and the notes taken as the participants responded to the questions (Natow, 2020).

After transcribing the data, participants were emailed the transcripts to review. Feedback was requested specifically on the completeness and accuracy of the data. This member checking process added credibility to the study by allowing the participants to review my interpretation of the data and confirm or deny if it was an accurate portrayal of their information (Stahl & King, 2020). This process also reduced the potential for

research biases, decreased the incidence of incorrect data, and allowed verification for the accuracy and the completeness of the collected data.

Transferability

External validity or transferability is the extent to which the findings of one research study can be functional to another study (Adler, 2022), allowing the description and patterns observed or recorded to be utilized by other researchers. Participants shared detailed descriptions of personal and professional experiences of how they interact with the children based on their beliefs about how children learn. They gave detailed descriptions of how the JECC guided their practices as they catered to the learning needs of the children. Additionally, a detailed description of the literature supporting the study, and a detailed description of the participants allow other researchers to generalize the findings.

Dependability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), if the study remains stable over time, dependability is assumed. To achieve dependability of the study, the following techniques were used, data triangulation, member checking, research notes, and feedback from my peers and my dissertation chair. A colleague reviewed interview notes to ensure that without having an intimate knowledge of the study they could achieve the same conclusions. The study's dependability was again achieved through presenting a detailed description of the research procedure, participants and the data analysis. Adding to the study's dependability were the use of the audio recordings and the interview questions.

Confirmability

Confirmability in a qualitative study requires that the researcher articulates the findings as objective as possible (Stahl & King, 2020). In order to avoid bias, throughout the interviews, I focused the practitioners' responses and used member checking to ensure that the responses were accurately captured. In cross-checking the transcripts, researcher bias was eliminated. The transcription of the data also augmented confirmability because having documentation of the precise recordings of the beliefs and experiences of the practitioners functioned as the catalyst for my research findings.

Results

This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore early childhood practitioners' beliefs regarding children's development and learning based on the curriculum. In this section, the study's findings are arranged in a structured sequence in relation to the research questions. Patterns were noted as they emerged in the interviews and were confirmed after coding. The patterns then developed into categories and themes.

Research Question 1

Four themes emerged from research question 1: What are ECPs beliefs regarding children's development and learning? The themes were:

- Theme 1: ECPs believed that children developed in stages and learn through actively interacting with their environment.
- Theme 2: Parents who actively participated in their child's education, positively influenced their development and learning.

- Theme 3: ECPs believed that education was not static; and as a consequence, teachers must be flexible and embrace new ideas.
- Theme 4: ECPs beliefs were formed intrinsically and extrinsically.

Theme 1

ECPs believed that children developed in stages and learn through actively interacting with their environment. The participants interviewed agreed that children develop in stages, and based on their uniqueness, they learn based on the level of interaction in the environment. When asked about their beliefs regarding children's development and learning, participants gave examples of theories which aligned with their beliefs and experiences. They cited child development theories from Piaget and Vygotsky's on how children developed according to four primary areas of development, "physical development, cognitive development, language development, and socio-emotional development. Practitioner P-005 stated, "I believe they develop in stages ... they have specific milestones." Practitioner P-007 stated "I use Piaget's stages of development." Practitioner P-005 articulated that "I also believe that they develop in stages, periods of development. They have specific milestones, and so the child from zero to six would have some common developmental milestones. In planning for them, we will have to understand those periods of development in order to impact their learning."

The participants believed there are different types of learners: auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile. They believe that the learning environment should be prepared to meet the needs of the different types of learners. As the child interacts with the enabling classroom environment, "They actively construct their understanding of the

world, one participant articulated.” In order to adequately provide for the children, the teacher must be able to identify each child’s learning style and allow each child to learn at their own pace. Practitioner P-002 stated, “How children develop is a continuous process.” She went on to indicate that children develop and grow at their own pace. Reinforcing this position, participant P-003 also stated, “Children are active learners,” “No two children are alike,” and that early childhood practitioners cannot use a “One size fit all” approach to the practices in the learning environment.

Theme 2

Parents who actively participated in their child’s education, positively influenced their development and learning. As the interviews were conducted practitioners indicated that parent’s involvement in school activities allowed children to adjust quickly and develop confidence. Practitioner P-002 indicated, “Partnering with parents is very important ... as parents are a child’s first teacher.” Participant P-005 noted, “The parents became my partners.” She went on to say, “We opened up the classroom to the parents to come in from time to time and volunteer. So, they were now able to see, not from afar off, they were able to experience from closer.” Participant P-009 also referenced:

We have a parent’s log where the parents will log in what they will do as a parent to assist the child in that area of weakness. The teacher will say to the parents, this is what I am going to do; these are the strategies being implemented to assist the child in the areas of weakness, what you are going to do to assist. Parents, children and teachers collaborate for one common goal.

Practitioners believe that the child’s home environment also affects their learning

at school. This means that practitioners must consider and understand the children's background and home life in trying to understand and plan for the different types of learners. Participant P-006 explains it well, "You have children coming to you from different ethnic group, backgrounds, culture, environment, and different circumstances." Practitioner P-003 indicated, "I think it was a practice we had, us as teachers thought that teaching takes place at school and separate at home. ...there was a disconnect between home and school. But when the JECC came in, parental involvement was included in the curriculum. We saw how we could include the parents and share with them themes and activities."

Theme 3

ECPs believed that education was not static; and as a consequence, teachers must be flexible and embrace new ideas. As the participants responded to the questions it was evident that they used the JECC, and believed that education was not static. Practitioner P-001 clearly support this belief and stated, "My mantra is education is not static. It is ever evolving; I would research new ideas, and I would link it back to the theories to help me effectively carry out my teachable moments." Education evolves to meet the future needs of all learners to be creative thinkers and problem solvers. Practitioners must understand this objective as they prepare future generations. Practitioner P-008 indicated that she does additional research to ensure that she is meeting the needs of the children "I teach the youngest in the school, the three-year-olds, and know what children at that stage are supposed to be doing ... online and search and what I see, what I learn, I try to incorporate it in my classroom."

Practitioner P-009 added, “Understanding the stage of cognitive development, emotional and social development that children go through, helps me tailor my teaching methods to their specific needs and abilities.” She also states, “Every child is unique . . . , so flexibility in teaching methods allows me to adapt to individual needs and provide a personal learning experience.” It was the consensus of the interviewees that early childhood practitioners should develop flexible child-centered methods of engaging the children, allowing them the space to explore. It was believed that to provide adequate experiences, practitioners should engage in research, embracing new teaching ideas.

Theme 4

ECPs beliefs were formed intrinsically and extrinsically. Pajares (1992) posits that beliefs are internal constructs that assist in defining how an individual understands and gives meaning to their experiences. The beliefs that are not always clearly visible significantly impact the practitioners’ decisions and actions in the learning environment. The participants in the study believed that children developed in stages, and changed over time based on their interactions. They believed that the child learns through interaction and exploration of their environment. Participant P-003 stated:

I think they should be part of what they learn in order for them to be who they can be. I have come to realize that the more the children are involved in the learning, the more you expose them and give them opportunity to explore and experiment and to communicate their feelings,

Participant P-004 declared, “They develop and learn at a rapid pace in their early years.” Practitioner beliefs are intrinsic and motivated by the influences from experiences

or an event that happened in their life. Their beliefs are extrinsic and influenced by external factors such as the training they received at teachers' college regarding the theories of child development from Piaget and Vygotsky. Participant P-002 related a story from her childhood that motivated and developed her into the teacher she is today. P-002 voiced, "I remember Aunt Daphne coming into the community and I was walking in her footsteps, I wanted to be like her because she was so nice." All the participants referenced children's development as a continuous process, and their development and learning are enabled through exploring and interacting with their environment. They believe that because "no two children are alike." P-009 stated:

My beliefs about child development influence my teaching in several ways. I recognize that every child develops at their own pace and has their unique strengths and challenges. This understanding guides me to tailor my teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of each child, fostering a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

Participant P-006 responded, "As an educator, it is important that I always cater to my children's healthy developmental needs."

Research Question 2

Three themes emerged from the data relating to research question 2: How do ECPs view the influence of their beliefs on their implementation of the Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum? The themes were:

- Theme 1: ECPs believed that the JECC, while a very good document, was a guide and must be supported with other resources.

- Theme 2: ECPs believed that their beliefs were in alignment with the JECC.
- Theme 3: ECPs believed that teacher preparedness and classroom resources are critical factors in appropriately implementing the JECC.

Theme 1

ECPs believed that the JECC while a very good document, was a guide and must be supported with other resources. The participants agreed that the JECC was a “vital tool that must be used, at the early childhood level for structured and effective learning,” as articulated by participant P-001. When asked how the JECC related to their beliefs about children’s development and learning, they responded positively and indicated that they used the curriculum and but had to use other resources when planning the activities. Participant P-004 stated about herself and the other practitioners at her school, “... It heavily influences the way we teach. All areas of the curriculum can be used with hands-on experiences.” Following are direct quotes from participants regarding the curriculum.

Participant p-004 stated

The curriculum, I believe has aided us in such a way that everything we need as a teacher is captured in the curriculum. The structure and organization of the curriculum, is to be commended. It has captured the developmental stages of the child. When you look at the developmental objectives, we are able to find objectives that suit all learners.

Participant P-006 support this belief and added:

The Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum, to me, is important in early childhood education. It is a curriculum designed so that it helps with the learning process of

our students. I believe it is a crucial phase of a child's life that needs to be managed with utmost care. The advantage of the curriculum to me is that it provides a definite structure that offers a direction that is followed in order to reach a specific goal.

Other participants supported their beliefs by saying, "... It speaks to activities being child-friendly, hands-on and interactive" and "the curriculum has some guiding principles of learning through play, sequenced learning"

Theme 2

ECPs believed that their beliefs were in alignment with the JECC, and used the curriculum to guide classroom practices. As the interviews progressed the responses illustrated that the participants believed that their beliefs were aligned with the curriculum. "The JECC facilitates active learning," participant P-003 explains.

Articulating further she explained:

It facilitates student engagement; it facilitates independent learning as well as group learning. It facilitates holistic development. So, you know, it's touching all areas. It is touching how children learn. Whether they are kinesthetic, auditory, tactile, or whatever way they learn, the JECC is seeking to facilitate for those learners. It is in alignment.

Participant P-004 commented, "The guiding principles are definitely in alignment with my beliefs." Participant P-005 endorsed that, stating, "I can say resoundingly that I believe that my view of early childhood development is fully in the curriculum." The curriculum, as previously stated, is learner-centered and play-based and has at its core the

milestones required for children to develop and learn individually. The curriculum, if executed well, values each child's ability and caters instruction to each individual needs. All participants have indicated that they use the JECC to create lessons and a learning environment that is stimulating and relevant to the individual learners. Practitioner P-001 noted:

It is related to my beliefs in how children develop; the curriculum has some guiding principles of learning through play, sequenced learning and individual learning, inclusion of all children, integrated curriculum and the domains of development. I believe that it is designed to be developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant for all children.

Theme 3

ECPs believed that teacher preparedness and classroom resources are critical factors in appropriately implementing the JECC. The participants believed that teacher preparedness for the different types of learners and the learning environment having adequate and appropriate resources to engage the children are critical. There are a number of factors that directly affect student outcomes; two of the most important are teacher competence and the learning environment (Alif et. al., 2020). The participants articulated that if teachers prepare using the curriculum, they would be successful in meeting the needs of their learners. Others added that inadequate resources influence their ability to interact in the learning environment. Participant P-005, describing the need to prepare for her learners, remarked "It is first important for me to understand what it is I want my children to learn." Participant P-009 expressed that: "Educators might interpret certain

aspects differently, leading to a discrepancy in the learning experience.” She continued by quoting Benjamin Franklin “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” P-006 articulated that:

We can go beyond our comfort zone and implement what we want to implement in order to cater to the different ways children learn. So, as a teacher, you have to be creative when planning your lesson to cater to the different learning needs of your children, in order to include everybody in the lesson.

Participant P-003 commented, “Sometimes the resources that you would want to utilize are not available, and you have to make adaptations.” P-004 supported this position and stated, “I think that’s one of the major challenges. Related to stories for the themes, especially stories that are culturally relevant to Jamaica.” Participant P-003 spoke about the importance of setting up the learning environment to facilitate learning, “the different learning centers are important within early childhood. The activities placed within these areas will cater for the diverse learners, the different learning needs of each child.” She added “I have to ensure that I provide a classroom that is conducive to the different learning styles of each child.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, the study’s results were reported by using the participants detailed responses through a thematic review of the data. The themes were linked to the research questions, and the data supporting each theme was presented. The study’s key findings indicated early childhood practitioners believed that children developed in stages and learn through exploring their environment. Children learn best through play and should

actively participate in their learning. It was also determined that practitioners had beliefs about children's development and learning based on their experiences and training as teachers. ECPs reported that the JECC was a valuable tool that they used, as it provided a guide to good practice and gave examples of how to teach a lesson. They added that they used other resources to strengthen the delivery of the JECC, as research is critical at the early childhood level. The participants also report that parental involvement is vital to the children's success as the parent was the child's first teacher. Finally, they expressed the need for the teacher to be prepared and plan, having appropriate and adequate resources to include all types of learners.

Chapter 5, presents the interpretation of the findings and a discussion of the limitations and recommendations for future research. Also presented in chapter 5 are the implications for positive social change for stakeholders, including children, ECI personnel, parents, and policymakers.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore early childhood practitioners' beliefs regarding children's development and learning based on their implementation of the JECC. Semistructured questions were used to interview nine ECPs regarding their beliefs about children's development and learning and the alignment of their beliefs with the early childhood curriculum. Pajares' (1992) teachers' belief theory was the conceptual framework that supported the study. Additionally, the literature was extensively reviewed to understand practitioners' beliefs; the definition, origin, and categories of these beliefs; the distinction between knowledge and beliefs; and the features of those beliefs. The design of the study addressed the research gap of an understanding of practitioners' beliefs regarding children's development and learning, and how these beliefs influenced classroom practice. The study specifically focused on how the JECC was implemented based on their beliefs.

The key findings of the study indicate that early childhood practitioners believe that children develop in stages according to developmental milestones, and they learn through interacting and exploring their environment. The educators all felt that children learn best through play. Consequently, children should be active participants in their learning. Based on the responses, it became evident that practitioners' beliefs had developed through their own experiences and were both intrinsic and extrinsic. They also believed parents should be partners in the education process and saw the early childhood curriculum as a valuable tool to guide classroom practice. Last, they expressed the need for practitioner preparedness, planning, and appropriate and adequate resources to include

all learners. The subsequent sections present the interpretation of the findings in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review, along with the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Presented in this section is an interpretation of the findings that extend the knowledge in Jamaica regarding practitioners' beliefs and how their beliefs influence how they implement the JECC. The interpretations were determined and guided by the research questions and the conceptual framework of Pajares' (1992) teachers' belief theory, which assisted in confirming an understanding of the beliefs of ECPs about children's development and learning. The interpretation of the findings is organized in relation to the research questions. The first four themes relate to RQ 1: What are the beliefs of ECPs regarding children's development and learning? The final three themes relate to RQ 2: How do ECPs view the influence of their beliefs on their implementation of the JECC?

Research Question 1

Theme 1

The ECPs believed that children developed in stages and learn through actively interacting with their environment. This finding is consistent with the information obtained from the literature review. Child development theorists like Piaget posited the theory that children develop in stages (Saracho, 2021). Based on the interview data, all ECPs felt the environment should motivate the children to investigate and learn through their play activities. All spoke to the works of child development theorists, such as Piaget

and Vygotsky's theories of how children develop, and indicated that their own research had concretized their beliefs. However, participants in the study also believed that ECPs needed to create a proper learning environment where children are adequately motivated to investigate and learn from their environment. They felt that children learn best through play and, therefore, must have opportunities that facilitate child-centered learning. There is a plethora of research studies that have given evidence of the importance of play supporting their developmental domains (Alahmari et al., 2023) and giving them the ability to recall information and develop skills as they explore their environment (Ali et al., 2018). Play provides children with a means of exploration, adding to skill development (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019).

The overall beliefs of ECPs were that, fundamentally, children are unique in their development; no two children are the same. ECPs noted that while children develop in stages, each child is unique. To influence their learning, the classroom environment and teaching practices should be interactive and exploratory supporting the children's growth. They also believed that the activities in the learning environment should be child-centered (see also Saracho, 2021). Children's active engagement in the environment is a reflection on their thinking, how they interpret instructions, interact with their peers, and their socioemotional intelligence—essential to their executive functions.

Theme 2

The ECPs also suggested that parents are their partners, and their active participation positively influences their children's development and learning. Improved communication and positive parent-school relationships are essential in the early

childhood environment (Kelty & Wakabayachi, 2020). The ECPs interviewed initiated communication with the families as is required for children at that stage on the education continuum. The parents of younger children must be updated daily and in critical situations where children need additional support. ECPs provide updates based on their daily observation of the children as required by the Early Childhood Act (2005). The interview participants responded that this practice is necessary to ensure that the parents participate in their children's development and learning, and they developed multiple ways to engage families. As articulated by P-005, "We opened up the classroom for parents to come in from time to time and volunteer." P-003 added, "One of the things that aided me was the inclusion of parents in the teaching and learning." ECPs stated that limited communication with families, especially lack of proper communication with parents, resulted in some parents feeling omitted from their child's development and learning. Seven of the Nine ECPs spoke about how and why they initiated increased communication with the families and created activities for involvement that are required by the early childhood legislation.

The literature also demonstrated that children's educational experiences can be strengthened through social system connections. This happens when there is collaboration between the family and school (Kelty & Wakabayachi, 2020). Participants agreed that the learning environment should create an experience for parents, children, and staff that fosters positive experiences for all stakeholders. Children first observe their parents, and therefore, a strong relationship with the school will enhance children's development and learning. The relationships are strengthened when parents understand

the activities and practices within the learning environment.

Theme 3

ECPs believed that education was not static and that ECPs must develop a flexible attitude that embraces new ideas. Overall, ECPs were using the JECC and believed that the documents guided the development of their activity plans for their classroom practices. They also indicated that the examples suggested in the JECC gave the foundation that allowed them to do additional research as they plan the activities. It allowed them to develop each child as a unique learner and cater to their individual needs. They also believed that education was not static and, therefore, the early childhood educator must be equipped to meet the needs of a developing education system that accommodates different types of learners. Children are unique, and each new group of learners requires the methodology used to fit the learner and how that child learns. Fundamentally particular skills are required to work with children and their families at the early childhood level (Mikuska et al., 2023). The finding was reinforced by participants giving examples of how they included strategies and techniques to meet the needs of each learner and the changing expectations of the educational landscape. There is a relation between knowledge and practice (Mikuska et al., 2023); therefore, practitioners must know about child development and the different types of learners to implement practices that meet the needs of individual learners.

All participants indicated that they were aware of the different types of learners, auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile. In the explanation offered by ECPs, children develop and learn in stages. Additionally, each child's stage of development and learning

should be respected. Practitioners must decipher the elements that may or may not be affecting how that child learns and strive to fit the curriculum, the activities, and the learning environment to meet the needs of the child's learning ability and skills. In the learning environment, practitioners have a wide range of strategies to use to illustrate the lessons from the curriculum, allowing the interactions to be meaningful to each child (Manas, 2020). If a child is not valued, they will struggle to reach their full potential grappling with feelings of insecurity and fear (Manas, 2020).

Children are natural explorers and become active participants in their learning journey. All participants agreed that children construct knowledge by interacting with their environment and the learning environment should facilitate experiential learning. This finding suggests that for consistency to be established and sustained across the sector in the delivery of the JECC, in-service training must facilitate the development of knowledge and skill among all practitioners, allowing them the foundations to develop the flexibility needed to embrace new ideas. This theme also reflects the ECPs' need for support and collaboration and the need for them to assist in scaffolding other ECPs in strengthening their classroom practices to support the uniqueness of the children they serve. In the early childhood learning environment, teachers play a vital role in assisting the learner to attain the requisite knowledge and skills for their development as adult learners as a part of the nation's future workforce. It is therefore critical for teachers to be properly trained to deliver on this national mandate, so in-service training is needed for teachers to develop their knowledge and skills as techniques and technology change (Saglam Arslan et al., 2022). The research on teacher training highlights a correlation

between good teacher and student outcomes (Hatfield et al., 2016).

Theme 4

ECPs beliefs are influenced by factors and experiences that occur internally and externally. They believe children develop at their own pace and according to developmental stages or milestones. The stages of development they were taught while studying to become teachers remained a part of their belief system. The participants quoted from the theorist they believed best described their beliefs regarding children's development. Primary among these were Piaget's theory that children learn through stages of development and by interacting with their environment and Vygotsky's theory that children's learning develops through social interactions. ECPs believed that children learn as they explore and interact with their environment; therefore, the learning environment must have the relevant resources that support their exploration as they construct their own learning.

The interpretation of the findings in light of the conceptual framework suggests an alignment with beliefs expressed by the ECPs and the features of beliefs expressed by Nespor (1987). The four features of beliefs articulated by Nespor are (1) existential presumption, (2) alternativity, (3) affective and evaluative loading, and (4) episodic structure. Existential presumptions are ECP's beliefs that are incontrovertible (Pajares, 1992) as these beliefs are shaped by chance, an experience, or an event. As participant P-002 responded to why she became a teacher of young children, she related her experiences as a child walking literally in the footsteps of her favorite teacher and later wanting to give the children in her classroom the same experiences. The consensus of the

participants was that early childhood chose them, and they related events in their childhood that began shaping their belief systems. As they illustrated their reasons for becoming teachers, they gave a combination of all four features of beliefs. They spoke about events that occurred earlier in their journey that left lasting impressions.

P-003 voiced, “I had some great basic school teachers.” I sought to emulate them because of their kindness and their patience and the compassion they showed to all the children in their care.” Pointing to beliefs formulated as “incontrovertible truths” of children needing an environment that shows them kindness, patience, and compassion as they developed and for learning to take place. The participants articulated their preferences regarding the interactive nature of the learning environment and the impact it has on the individual child’s ability to develop and learn; Pajares (1992) explained this as the affective and evaluative loading. This means, practitioners’ attitude and feelings, operate independently of their knowledge. Consequently, the practices in the learning environment occur in the context of the practitioners’ values (Nespor, 1987) and not related to the actual content. Participant P-005 declared that she came with a mindset of success. She wanted to create an environment that went beyond the basics, giving the children, teachers, and parents a positive experience. As the interviews progressed and the data unfolded, it was clear that the fourth feature of belief, as illustrated by Nespor and expounded by Pajares, as episodic structure, contributed to the formulation of their beliefs. The consensus of the participants was that personal experiences or cultural and institutional sources prompted their beliefs. For example, participant P-002 spoke about her earliest interactions with her kindergarten teacher, in whose footsteps she walked as a

child. She indicated that her desire to become an early childhood practitioner was predicated on her feelings as a child and her desire to give children similar experiences.

There were 3 themes relating to RQ2. How do early childhood practitioners view the influence of their beliefs on their implementation of the Jamaican early childhood curriculum?

Research Question 2

Theme 1

ECPs believed that the JECC, while a good document was a guide and used other resources to assist with creating their activity plans. As the interviews progressed, it became troubling that ECPs, while using the JECC, felt the need to use other resources to supplement the contents of the curriculum materials. At the end of the process, I gained a better understanding and interpretation of the ECPs responses to the interview questions. The purpose of the JECC is to guide ECPs in creating their daily activity plans for the children. As a tool, it provides the definitions and examples and proposes sample lessons to use with all types of learners, but the list and examples are not exhaustive. With the belief that education is not static, the early childhood educator using the JECC must undertake additional research to meet the needs of the children each year. Subramani & Iyappan (2018) suggest that within the learning environment, innovative teaching methods and the introduction of technology will benefit both the teachers and the children as practice is altered to meet the needs of the children.

P-001 articulated, "I use a variety of different strategies." I would look at the learning environment, their culture and genetics and incorporate in my teaching plan,

learning activities based on their backgrounds.” She went on to add that the JECC “was a guide they will use depending on the students they have in front of them.” P-005 to rebrand her early childhood institution (ECIs) making is a viable option for parents stated, “we started looking at the curriculum to see how we could let the curriculum work for the children and more so the school and build the image of the school.” This was further reinforced by P-009, “I analyze the curriculum in light of my belief that children are active learners who learn best through hands-on experiences. She added, “I modify the curriculum to suit individual needs, providing additional support or challenges as necessary.” “I adjust the level of difficulty by using sets of different objects for different students.” Practitioners believe that they should use the curriculum as a guide and develop complementary strategies to assist the children in developing the skills necessary for their success. The JECC suggests various ways through which practitioners can organize their practice to develop the children’s knowledge and skill in all domains of development. Castner et. al. (2022), describes the explicit and the implicit curriculum that seems to fit the position taken by the participants. The explicit curriculum, as posited by the authors, would be the content of the JECC that practitioners are guided to practice in the learning environment. The implicit content that is used to support learning is consciously or subconsciously executed. Participant P-003 opined, “It is a guide.” “It is not a bible to be quoted.” She added, “It is a blueprint but facilitates some level of adaptation.” She then stated, “When I am interpreting and using it, I go back to my belief that young children are active learners, and I try to emphasize or pull out the fact that we are looking at the whole child.”

Theme 2

ECPs believed that their beliefs are in alignment with the JECC. The participants' consensus was that their beliefs were aligned with the JECC. P-003 said, "It is definitely in alignment because the JECC facilitates active learning." She added, "It facilitates holistic development, touching all the areas for the different types of learners." P-004 stated JECC aligned with her beliefs, which she placed on the knowledge she has gained over the years, stating, "I would say it is align to my belief because of what I learned over the years based on what I have studied throughout time". Reinforced by P-008, who declared it was in alignment: "It is in alignment. For instance, we are doing farm animals, I believe in using play and bringing in the arts." The curriculum suggests you are to use a mask, create a mask and have the children role play." P-009 articulated, "It is within alignment because one of my beliefs is that we look at the developmental stages of the children." "Within the curriculum there are areas that speak about the intellectual. Within our lesson plans we look at developmental objectives." She ended by stating, "So we have wellness, communication, valuing culture, intellectual empowerment, respect for self, others and the environment and resilience. All these cognitive, emotional, social, and physical falls under the six developmental objectives I just spoke about." "So, it is aligned with my beliefs." There is a high level of implementation fidelity (Clayback et. al., 2022) in learning environments where practitioners believe in the curriculum. Clayback et al posits that fidelity is evident through the practices in the learning environment, as the curriculum is implemented as it is intended. Participant responses, as indicated are evidence of implementation fidelity of the JECC.

Theme 3

ECPs believed that teacher preparedness and classroom resources are critical factors in appropriately implementing the JECC. The consensus among the participants was that the capacity of an ECP, their ability to be prepared, and ECPs having the requisite knowledge and skill are key factors in the effective implementation of the JECC. They believe that access to appropriate resources to create valuable interactive learning experiences for their children is another crucial element in ensuring the effective implementation of the curriculum. Participants conversations centered around the skills needed to support the children to ensure a quality learning environment. They offered that practitioners must consistently assess the development and learning of the children to ensure that they know the different types of learners in the classroom and are adequately prepared. Child outcomes depend on the quality of practices and, to a large extent, on the teacher-child interactions within the learning environment. Teachers decide the activities and how the activities are executed (Clayback et. al., 2022). It is, therefore, critical that practitioners are prepared and understand the curriculum and the learning goals that are the aim of proper execution. The literature also supports the fact that practitioners need to understand the types of learners. Lersilp et al (2021). suggest that an assessment of a child's learning is the best method for teachers to use to design suitable learning activities geared toward skill development. Lersilp et al further support the study participant's position that as children are engaged in play activities, practitioner observations are critical to further support the children's learning and development.

Limitations of the Study

The study, as with all qualitative research studies, include limitations. Ravitch and Carl (2016) articulated that the limitations of qualitative research is based on its subjectivity and that qualitative research is exposed to the interpretation of individual researchers. During the proposal stage, one of the significant limitations outlined was the COVID-19 pandemic. This limitation was removed by 2022 when schools began reopening, countries attained herd immunity, and better management of the conditions were established.

The data collected was limited to those participants who consented and were available to be interviewed. The 9 ECPs interviewed was a minuscule percentage of the ECPs within the early childhood sector in Jamaica. The beliefs of this small group regarding how children develop and learn may not be reflective of the beliefs of all practitioners in the sector. Deciding to use interviews as the data collection method also created another potential limitation as the strength of the data being collected relied on the interviewer's ability and the interviewee's honesty. In encouraging truthfulness among the participants to ensure accurate information, they were reassured that their responses were their beliefs and that there were no hidden or perfect answers to the interview questions.

The final limitation addressed was the potential for personal bias regarding the ECPs use of the JECC. This originated from observations made during visits to ECIs and discussions with ECC's Field Officers. With the assistance of my committee chair, this potential limitation was addressed through careful design and review of the interview

questions, and keeping research notes to assess my ability to record objective data.

Recommendations

After reviewing the interpretation of the study's findings, and reflecting on the data collected I concluded that there were areas that would benefit from further research. This was further determined by the need for more information regarding the beliefs of ECPs in Jamaica, the strengths and limitations of this study and the literature reviewed in chapter 2.

Future research should consider a larger and more diverse samples, including a comparison of the beliefs of ECPs working in different parts of Jamaica. This recommendation also includes adding the beliefs of male ECPs even though there is a larger percentage of females in the early childhood sector. Second, future research should include practitioners new to teaching with less than 10 years of experience at the early childhood level. The ECPs interviewed had more than 15 years teaching. The third recommendation is exploring the ECI administrators/principal's beliefs regarding how children develop and learn. This may provide insight regarding the impact of school policy on implementing the JECC and if this implementation is in alignment with practitioners' beliefs. Additionally, future review of the curriculum should focus on those areas that are extensively used by practitioners and provide additional suggestions to assist practice. Of equal importance to be recommended for redesign are those sections that are neglected by practitioners. Linked to this is the final recommendation of the areas designated by ECPs as their "least favorite part". Participants indicated that there was a gap in the section of the curriculum regarding 5-year-olds and the transition to grade 1.

Participants indicated that this section was their least favorite part as there was no distinct link between the final sections and the national standards curriculum used in primary, grade 1.

Implications for Positive Social Change

In exploring the study topic of ECPs beliefs' regarding children's development and learning and their influence on how they implement the curriculum, I concluded that there was limited research in Jamaica investigating practitioners' beliefs at the early childhood level. This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore practitioners' beliefs regarding children's development and learning and how these beliefs influence their implementation of the JECC. The results of the study indicates that ECPS believed that the JECC was academically sound and effective and was to be used as a guide as they developed their weekly activity plans. Participants felt that for children to benefit from the learning environment, practitioners ought to be prepared to meet the needs of the different types of learners and should ensure appropriate resources are present to stimulate child-centered learning through exploration and interaction. In identifying the gap in the JECC, the participants agreed that there was a disconnect in the sections for the four- and five-year-olds. If this section was expanded with a connection between the ages and then with clear outline on how to support the children's transition to Grade 1 then the JECC would be a better resource. The work from this study could bring about positive social change as the information from the study is necessary for policymakers to have a clear understanding of how teachers' belief systems influence the outcomes of early childhood learners. The study's outcome will have implications for ensuring a higher

level of fidelity in the implementation of the JECC, and adding to the existing literature regarding the link between teacher beliefs and practices. The results of this study have implications for adjusting the in-service training of ECPs to include strategies that reflect their beliefs and the impact on the implementation of the JECC. As recommended by the ECPs, it is also hoped that there is a review of the JECC to identify and correct the gaps in specific areas of the curriculum to promote a seamless transition to primary.

At the local level, empirical research could bring about positive social change through the proper implementation of the JECC by practitioners assisting children in developing the skills and attitudes necessary to be lifelong learners. On the international level, an efficient early childhood sector would directly impact Jamaica's National Goal #1, "Jamaicans are empowered to achieve their fullest potential" under Vision 2030 Jamaica. Educational skills through the appropriate curriculum delivery will positively influence individual and collective transformation, causing positive social change.

Conclusion

This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore ECPs beliefs in how children develop and learn and how these beliefs influence their implementation of the JECC. The study's findings will add to the body of knowledge in Jamaica regarding ECP's beliefs and alignment with the JECC. The results confirm that practitioners' beliefs, however they are formed, influence their practice within the early childhood learning environment and how they implement the JECC as they support the different types of learners. The ECPs interviewed felt that the JECC aligned with their beliefs about children's development and learning and therefore create learning environments

that focus on the children's individual uniqueness. ECPs felt that the JECC needed to be reviewed to address the gaps identified in the study and assisted with additional resources to facilitate children's development and learning. The findings confirmed that the participants believed, to realized positive child outcome, parents must partner, and be actively involved in the ECI activities. Finally, ECPs need ongoing training and support to build their knowledge and skills in implementing the JECC. This study may also encourage a review of the in-service training model, ensuring a greater focus on coaching and scaffolding of new ECPs. This change will provide a collaborative approach that incorporates effective strategies for implementing the JECC.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Study: “Early Childhood Practitioners’ Beliefs Regarding Children’s Development and Learning Based on the Curriculum”

Time of Interview:

Date:

Methodology:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Script:

Good morning/afternoon/evening:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. As I previously indicated I am a graduate student at Walden University. I am conducting a study as a part of fulfilling the requirements for a PhD. in Education. Thank you for responding to my email and accepting my invitation to participate in the study. The interview will take 90 minutes and will include approximately 17 to 20 questions regarding your experiences using the Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum (JECC).

I would like your permission to record this interview so that I may accurately document the information based on your responses. After I have transcribed the notes, you will be given the opportunity to review your responses to ensure that they were accurately captured. If during the interview you wish to stop, please feel free to let me know. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used by me to develop a better understanding of what influences you and your peers as you implement the early childhood curriculum. The purpose of the study is to increase our understanding of your beliefs in how children develop and learn and how this belief influences your implementation of the early curriculum.

I take this opportunity to thank you again for participating, and remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation without consequences.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Background

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Why did you choose early childhood education/development? What are some of the largest influences on how you teach young children?

Beliefs

3. What are your beliefs on how children develop? Tell me more? How do these beliefs influence how/what you teach? What else can you add to that?

4. What are your beliefs on how children learn? How do these beliefs influence how/what you teach? What else can you add to that?
5. How does the JECC relate to your beliefs about how children develop and learn?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to add that would assist me in understanding your beliefs about how children develop and learn and what/how you teach?

Curriculum

7. Please tell me about how you decide how to interpret and use the curriculum? Can you expand on that a bit more?
8. What are your views on the Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum? Please elaborate on your response? What are your favorite or least favorite parts?
9. How helpful is the curriculum in developing your classroom practices? How influential is the curriculum on your practices? Please elaborate on your response?
10. What barriers do you encounter while using the JECC in the learning environment? Can you provide specific examples?
11. What specific examples can you give me regarding your challenges (or ease) with using the JECC?
12. What encourages you or discourages you from using the JECC?
13. How do your beliefs make using the JECC harder or easier for you? Can you provide specific examples?
14. To what extent do your peers have similar beliefs about how children develop or learn? How do their beliefs influence how you implement the curriculum?
15. To what extent does feedback at the curriculum sessions assist you in implementing the curriculum? Can you share examples?
16. In what ways does the curriculum align or is out of alignment with your beliefs on how children develop and learn? Can you provide specific examples? Do you attend Professional Development sessions on curriculum delivery or child development? How have these sessions influenced your classroom practices?
17. Is there anything else that you would like to add that would assist me in understanding your view on the influence of your beliefs on how you have implemented the curriculum?

Thank you for participating in my study, your participation is totally voluntary. After I have transcribed the notes, you will be given the opportunity to review your responses to ensure that they were accurately captured. I am reminding that your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used by me to develop a better understanding of what influences you and your peers as you implement the Jamaica early childhood curriculum. After the data is collected the information will be analyzed. When it is completed, I will share a summary of the study with you. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Appendix B: Codes, Categories, and Themes

Table B1*Emergent Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 1*

Codes	Categories	Themes
<p>Children are learning sponges, they are active learners/participants, they have individual learning styles, each child is unique, children develop better when they are involved, teachers must identify strategies to make learning fun. Children must have interactions with their environment. Each child has a unique way how they learn. Children are natural explorers; collaborative learning is important in early childhood. Teachers must have an understanding of the stages child development.</p>	<p>Children grow and change over time. They learn from their environment. Learning through play is important in the early childhood learning environment. Children have individual learning styles. Children learn in diverse ways, there are different types of learners.</p>	<p>Children develop in stages and they learn through interactions with their environment.</p>
<p>Families play a significant role in a child's learning. Create an environment for parents, children and staff will have positive experiences. Parents becomes partners, we opened the classroom for parents to come in from time-to-time. Inclusion of parents in the teaching and learning environment. There is sometimes a disconnect between home and school. Parental involvement is a part of the early childhood curriculum. Meeting the needs of the children becomes hard if parents do not "buy" into what the teacher is sharing.</p>	<p>Fostering partnerships with parents. Parental involvement is a part of the JECC. Parents are the child's first teacher. Parents must have an understanding of what is being taught. Parents must be given the opportunity to participate in activities.</p>	<p>Parental involvement positively impacts children's development and learning.</p>
<p>Practitioners should develop teaching methods to meet the specific needs of children – their different learning styles. "I like research, so I go online and research and incorporate in my classroom. Practitioners should do more research to develop their understanding of children's learning needs. Children develop in four main areas physical, cognitive, language and social/emotional aspects. "I incorporate other material that enhances learning at the early childhood level." Accommodating diverse learners. The activities in the learning environment must provide for all learners. "You are not sticking to one document to facilitate learning because education is not static."</p>	<p>There must be an understanding of the different types of learners and practitioners must research new ideas. Practitioners should embrace new ideas. The learning environment must appeal to all learners. Researching of new ideas must be consistent and in keeping with the individuals needs of all tyles of learners. Adaptation to the individual learning needs of the learners.</p>	<p>Education is not static.</p>
<p>"The largest influence on how I teach young children is based on their background." "I have a passion for young children." "I also believe in the teacher being in the environment to guide the children." The use of the theorists when operating in the learning environment. "I use Piaget stages of development." Children learn in different stages. Children develop in a dynamic interconnected process that impacts the cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth. "I believe in experiential learning." A lot of learning is taking place as children play.</p>	<p>Various factors influence my teaching ECD. Ability to have a positive impact on children. The learning environment must be child-centered. Activities being child-friendly, hands-on and interactive.</p>	<p>Beliefs are both intrinsic and extrinsic.</p>

Table B2*Emergent Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 2*

Codes	Categories	Themes
<p>"I believe in it and I believe in implementing it." Everything you need as a teacher is captured in the curriculum. It is a curriculum that is designed to help the learning process of our students, it is structured and is a roadmap which supports pedagogical skills. "So, I gradually used it as a guide." Children don't learn in the same way hence; the curriculum must be used as a guide. It serves as a guide. It keeps me in line with how to prepare and plan for the students. Modifying activities to provide additional support for struggling learners. Interpret and use it as a guide, the curriculum is used with other teaching resources</p>	<p>The JECC helps the learning process. Teachers should create an environment that caters for individual needs. Using strategies that help to develop the children from other sources. Using other activities along with the examples in the JECC. Incorporate other materials that enhances children's learning.</p>	<p>Practitioners are using the JECC, but it is a guide and other resources are used.</p>
<p>"The fact that the curriculum helps me to cater to the different learning needs of my students and that it's flexible and its active." "It is definitely in alignment because the JECC facilitates active learning." It facilitates student engagement. "So, the guiding principles are definitely in alignment with my belief." "I think so, I can say that resoundingly that I believe that my view of early childhood development is fully in the curriculum." "I would say it is in alignment to my belief because what I have learned over the years and based on what I have studied throughout the time." "I analyze the curriculum in light of my beliefs that children are active learners who learn best through hands-on experiences."</p>	<p>JECC captures the developmental stages of the child. It is flexible and is a blueprint. The nine guiding principles are perfect. My belief in the developmental stages of children and so the curriculum is aligned. I thoroughly study the curriculum and document objectives and guidelines.</p>	<p>Practitioners' beliefs are aligned to the curriculum.</p>
<p>"You can cater to them using the curriculum no matter where they are and even how they learn." "I look for opportunities to connect different disciplines and concepts within the curriculum." Helping children to see the interconnectedness of knowledge. "I look at the curriculum, see what it is that I am doing and try to find ways to pull it out." "Sometimes some of the resources you would want to utilize is not available." A major challenge is finding related stories culturally relevant to Jamaica, to use with some of the themes in the curriculum.</p>	<p>The JECC has clearly identify goals. I know what my students should know and what they would know. The JECC outline the learning objectives. There is a challenge finding the resources that are culturally relevant to use in the learning environment.</p>	<p>Practitioners' preparedness and classroom resources</p>