



JAMAICA

COUNTRY PROFILE

This document provides a general panorama on education and Early Grade Literacy (EGL) in Jamaica. It is the result of a stakeholder mapping and analysis carried out by the LAC Reads Capacity Program and its national partner, EduConnectJA.

GENERAL CONTEXT

Jamaica is located in the northwestern Caribbean Sea, about 145 kilometers (90 miles) south of Cuba and 191 kilometers (119 miles) west of the island of Hispaniola, where Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located.

Based on the 2013 data from the Statistical Institute of Jamaica, the country has an estimated population of 2,717,991 of which 13.47% are children 0-8 years of age.

English is the official language of instruction in Jamaica. The indigenous language, Jamaican Patois, or Creole, is spoken in all regions. Most students come to the classroom environment speaking Patois; so teachers are encouraged to use this as a base for helping students to speak and write in English.

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Jamaica's formal education system has four levels: early childhood/pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary, with special education services offered at all levels. The government is the main provider of education with some support from the private sector. Most schools are operated by the government and are referred to as "public schools"; others are privately owned and operated by individuals and faith-based individuals or sponsored by the private sector. Overall, the government gives oversight to all schools.

There are 2,936 early childhood institutions in Jamaica catering to 0-5 year olds. Most of these are recognized community owned and operated "basic schools", 140 public schools and 135 private schools. Children ages 6-8 are enrolled in 933 primary-level institutions; 141 of these are privately owned.

Most private schools are housed in the urban areas, while public institutions are spread across Jamaica. Some of the higher performing schools are overpopulated because of the high demand for quality education from parents.

Common challenges in the education system include student absenteeism (which is lower for girls than for boys); low socioeconomic status; an inadequate number of college trained teachers in many of the early childhood institutions (specifically basic schools); and repetition (retention) rates at Grades 1 and 2. Dropout rates are low at the primary level.

Jamaica's Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information (MOEYI) has been concentrating on improving learning in the early grades. The Ministry has emphasized formative and summative assessments, curriculum development, and in-service and preservice teacher training to enhance the curriculum delivery. The MOEYI has also provided support

in the form of reading materials and Reading Coaches, and has been sensitizing the public to the importance of early stimulation.

PUBLIC POLICY

Two documents guide the teaching of literacy and language in the early grades: the National Comprehensive Literacy Strategy, developed in 2011, and the Language Education Policy (2001). Explanations of these documents follow.

The **Language Education Policy** (2001) describes Jamaica as a bilingual country, with Standard Jamaican English (SJE) and Jamaican Creole (JC) being the two languages in use. There are ongoing discussions among EGL stakeholders about how to use these two languages in schools. The MOEYI currently supports the option to retain SJE as the official language for EGL and encourages the use of the home language (JC) as the basic means of oral communication in the early years.

Over the past decade, academics have published numerous articles and texts advocating the use of Jamaican Creole as a legitimate medium for literacy instruction. However, the MOEYI maintains that SJE is the official language for instruction.

The Language Education Policy addresses: the Language Learner, Language Goals in Schools, Language Instruction, Literacy Teachers, Special Education, Assessment, and Teacher Education. The Policy emphasizes these five points:

- Creating opportunities to utilize a variety of indigenous forms – songs, poems, stories;
- Creating opportunities to hear and speak the target language in a variety of situations.
- Accepting children's first language;
- Focusing on content-based language teaching (integration across curriculum areas);
- Modeling of the target language in the classroom.

The National Comprehensive Literacy Strategy (NCLS) aims to “consolidate all literacy interventions to inform a national comprehensive literacy program”¹. It promotes, among others, the establishment of literacy standards and benchmarks, a National Curriculum with Literacy 1-2-3 materials, standardized national assessments, training for primary grade teachers on the teaching of reading, increased partnerships with other organizations working in the field of literacy, and improved public awareness. The development of the NCLS is part of government’s effort to achieve 100 per cent literacy at the primary level and to enable students to successfully transition to secondary school.

Literacy 1-2-3 is the MOEYI’s national strategy for teaching literacy and it is implemented in all primary schools. The strategy is guided by the Language Experience and Awareness Approach and incorporates themes in the Revised Primary Curriculum (1999), which are still relevant to the new National Standards Curriculum (2014). The strategy is supported by culturally relevant materials that make direct link to pupils’ experiences. The strategy is promoted in all primary schools.

The National Standards Curriculum for Language Arts, Grades 1-3 is geared towards enabling students to become active learners and confident and productive individuals. The NSC, through the use of a wide range of activities, provides opportunities for students to develop competence in: speaking and listening, word recognition and fluency, comprehension, grammar and conventions and finally writing (communication). The curriculum articulates with the Literacy Standards for Grades 1-6 that are a part of the National Comprehensive Literacy Strategy (2011).

¹ National Comprehensive Literacy Strategy. (2011, March). Retrieved from

The Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum (2009, 2010) documents include curriculum guides and scope and sequence to support the teaching of children from birth to 3 years, and 4- and 5-year-olds. In the early years, emergent literacy skills are emphasized throughout the curriculum. These skills include listening, talking, writing, and comprehension. Children are given opportunities to engage in meaningful activities to develop these skills. Such activities include listening to stories, talking about their favorite things, writing their names, interacting with print, and demonstrating their understanding of target words in stories.

TEACHER EDUCATION STANDARDS FOR TEACHING OF READING

Teacher education in Jamaica is designed to train teachers for the pre-, primary, and secondary schools, as well as subject specialists. To become eligible to receive teacher training education, a candidate must have five Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) subjects, including mathematics and English, and must pass an interview. On acceptance, the student is enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program for 4 years. During the 4 years, students will engage in four practicum exercises in schools. The Teachers’ Colleges of Jamaica (TCJ), develops the syllabi, which are submitted to the relevant bodies at the University of the West Indies to ensure that the syllabi have reached the standards of a bachelor’s degree. There is also a certification in Early Childhood Development provided by the Human Employment and Resource Training Trust, National Training Agency (HEART Trust/NTA).

The **Jamaica Teachers’ Association** is a democratic organization which advocates for the financial well-being and social advancements of its members. This teachers’ union seeks to promote the educational interests of Jamaica through professional development workshops and

<http://www.jisajm.com/PrinConf/ConfPres2011/LiteracyProg.pdf>

conferences aimed at improving teaching and learning. For example, they have hosted conferences on early childhood education, special education and primary education for school managers and teachers and out of these have made recommendations to the MOEYI for implementation.

RESOURCES AND EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

Materials used in Literacy 1-2-3 are provided in classroom sets by the MOEYI to all public primary schools in the country. The support materials include:

- Big Books and accompanying little books (1 book per 2 students) for Grades 1 and 2
- Pupils’ activity books for Grades 1 and 2;
- A phonics chart for grade 1;
- A grade 3 textbook with stories, expository pieces, poems and literacy activities (1 book per 2 students)
- CDs and tapes that support the text;
- Curriculum guide, teacher’s guides, a training manual, and a companion manual

On the basis of the national curriculum, practitioners are guided in the selection of student texts, as well as teacher texts. The book industry is also guided by the curriculum in making decisions about the content to include in their texts, which are prescribed by the MOEYI. Supplementary texts are sometimes used by teachers in cases where students have challenges

managing the ones prescribed, as well as in cases where students need to be further challenged. There is a lack of resources that specifically target diverse needs including cultural and gender related requirements of students. Of particular concern is the performance gap between boys and girls as boys’ performance continues to lag behind girls in language and literacy development.

Other weaknesses include the high cost of teaching materials, the high cost of producing books, too many of which are imported, and the late distribution of books to schools. There is also the general lack of accessibility and insufficient funds to support early childhood programming.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN EGL

The LRCP team conducted a stakeholder analysis to gain perspectives on the local EGL landscape. The stakeholders interviewed have worked in different aspects of early grade learning. Participants included MOEYI personnel, principals, classroom teachers, researchers. The data was captured mostly from urban communities. The participants were interviewed, for the most part, in their normal settings. Thus, we were able to observe the conditions under which they operated and also observe examples of the resources they used.

Table 1. Strengths & Challenges in EGL in Jamaica

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
1. High level of engagement and interest among stakeholders in EGL 2. Institutions training teachers for the early childhood level 3. Establishment of the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) to oversee the standardization of the early childhood institutions	1. Limited collaboration and knowledge sharing across institutions at all levels 2. Inadequate participation of stakeholders in policy making with regard to EGL at the developmental stage 3. Limited use of evidence-based research to inform teaching and learning practices

<p>4. Formalization of the Early Childhood curriculum</p> <p>5. Recent development of the National Standards Curriculum, which gives an expanded and defined focus on the teaching of reading, as it includes a structured reading program, along with suggested strategies for teaching reading</p> <p>6. Upgrading of libraries in the basic and primary schools by JLS with the support of the private sector</p> <p>7. Formal national assessments for the first time to determine readiness in EGL (4 year olds)</p> <p>8. Promotion of innovative practices to access relevant EGL materials, provision of training to teachers through firsthand experience and implementation of activities to address students who are having reading challenges</p> <p>9. Positive influence of Stakeholders on EGL within their institutions</p> <p>10. Strong focus on reading at the early grades.</p>	<p>4. Private school teachers need greater access to MOEYI reading materials and programs</p> <p>5. Securing adequate teaching materials because of cost factor</p> <p>6. Limited culturally relevant materials available</p> <p>7. Insufficient funds to adequately support Early Childhood programs</p> <p>8. Low power in policy making for most stakeholders</p>
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To sustain effective EGL initiatives, USAID/LAC Reads Capacity Program (LRCP) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) will:

- Collaborate with stakeholders in the early childhood sector to get buy-in and establish an EGL Community of Practice in order to: create a “think tank,” share successes, evidence-based research, and create innovative materials;
- ✓ Foster partnerships with the Private Sector to attract funding and EGL resources;
- ✓ Encourage formal and consistent engagement among government, practitioners, parents, and private sector from the conception to implementation of EGL policy and programs.