# UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS JAMIEKAN KRIYUOL: OFFICIALISATION VS ACCEPTANCE IN FORMAL SPACES

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**Abstract:**
Jamaica is the largest island of the Anglophone Caribbean and gained independence from Great Britain in 1962. However, despite English being the country's official language, the majority of the population speaks Jamaican Creole (JC) as their first language. This linguistic battle has affected educational and social outcomes. Many calls have been made for JC to be officialised, but attitudes toward this vary. This study seeks to ascertain undergraduate students' perceptions of JC and whether it should obtain official status and be accepted in more formal spaces. The study draws on a corpus of 20 students who responded to a forum on Moodle as part of an Academic Literacy course. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings reveal that students share mixed reactions toward the phenomenon. Those in favour of JC argue that it forms a critical part of cultural identity and heritage, and its officialisation would ensure cultural preservation and promotion. Additionally, the acceptance of JC in more formal spaces, such as educational institutions and courtrooms, would promote inclusion and reduce communication barriers. However,

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opponents argue that the lack of a standardised orthographic system can create problems and impede clarity in communication. Moreover, some believe that JC should not be used in formal settings, as it is unprofessional and associated with unintelligence. Furthermore, others argue for English to be maintained to promote international communication. The study has implications for curriculum develop and the promotion of courses in JC to expose students to the systems that already exist for knowledge expansion.

**Keywords:** Jamaican Creole, language perception, attitude, officialisation, identity

## 1. Introduction

Jamaica – the largest Anglophone Island of the Caribbean – was one of the first to have gained independence from its former colony, Great Britain, on August 6, 1962. Although the country has English as its official language, the reality is that the majority of its population is bilingual on a continuum, with a greater portion speaking *Jamiekan Kriyuol* or Jamaican Creole (JC) as its first language, which is yet to be accorded official status (Hoyte-West, 2022). Madden *et al.* (2024, p. 2) note that JC, also referred to as Jamaican Patwa, is a largely spoken language which is mastered by over three million people living both in Jamaica and in the Diaspora. Despite this reality, JC remains an unofficial language, with English – the language obtained from the slave masters – being the primary language of instruction and communication in educational institutions and State agencies. However, this linguistic battle has affected students' written and oral communication skills in English, which is reflected in both national and regional examinations – Primary Exit Profile (PEP) and Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). At the PEP level, 67 per cent of students were ranked as proficient or highly proficient in the 2024 sitting (Jamaica Observer), while 74 per cent received a passing grade – 1 to 3 – in English at the CXC level (Jamaica Gleaner). Even at the tertiary level in Jamaica, lecturers often complain about the struggles faced by students in academic writing and other writing-based courses (Madden, 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2015; Telfer & Stewart-McKoy, 2019). This has promoted calls for Jamaican children to be given a chance to be educated in their first language – JC – a language that they speak and master (Jamaica Gleaner, 2022; Byran, 2004).

However, even though there have been numerous calls for the officialisation of JC, especially as the country seeks to sever ties with the British Monarch by removing King Charles III as Head of State (Madden, 2023; New York Times, 2023), there is ambivalence among the population whether it should be officialised and accepted in formal spaces. While some people have embraced the linguistic variety and dynamism of JC, others consider it vulgar, too colourful, and a language associated with the less educated in society.

As citizens continue to grapple with their linguistic diversity and situate their personal and national identity, it is important to understand how the younger generation,

in particular university students, position themselves vis-à-vis JC. Consequently, this study seeks to garner the views of undergraduate students on JC, guided by the following question: What are students' perceptions of Jamaican Creole being officialised and accepted into formal spaces?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Brief Historical Overview of Jamaican Creole

Jamiekan Kriyuol, also called Jamaican, is a canonical example of an Atlantic Creole and one of the first Caribbean English-based Creoles to be described using modern linguistic methods (Loftman, 1953; Cassidy, 1961). To date, it remains one of the most researched. It is rooted in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, during which enslaved Africans from a variety of linguistic backgrounds were forcibly transported to the Caribbean island (Patrick, 2001) to work on sugar plantations. The British captured Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655 and ruled until the country's independence in 1962. In order to communicate with each other and their English-speaking colonisers, the enslaved created a simplified form of language known as pidgin (Pollard, 2019). Born of necessity and constraint, this pidgin was a tool of survival and, at its essence, resistance within an oppressive plantation matrix.

As a result of centuries of linguistic contact, the pidgin eventually became a Creole language with its own native speakers, complex syntax and vocabulary. JC embodies the diverse influences of, on the one hand, various African languages (Akan and Kwa families, along with Bantu), notably from West and Central Africa, and on the other, English dialects (West of England, Irish and Scots), the language of the colonisers (Sebba, 1997). It also absorbed elements from other languages spoken in the Caribbean, such as Spanish and Portuguese, further enriching its linguistic tapestry. Currently, the Jamaican population comprises over 90% of people of African descent. Other groups include Chinese, Indians, Syrians and European heritage. Of these groups, only Europeans were present before 1845 and contributed to the creation of JC (Patrick, 2008). JC is considered a national language, which serves as a marker to identify its people, distinguish them from others and unite them in ownership of a vibrant, unique, and diverse set of discursive resources.

JC has continued to flourish in both formal and informal contexts despite its historical stigma and discrimination. From music to literature, and even in daily conversations, Jamaican Patwa words are often used, helping to add considerable value to the island's cultural heritage. In recent years, a low-key but growing movement towards language revitalisation and recognition of JC as a legitimate and valuable language has contributed to attitudes toward the language. It gives a detailed account of historical events that contributed to the language and the power aspects and social dynamics of JC. It also shows the adaptability of human language in adversity and the lasting impact of colonialism and slavery in moulding languages. JC as a living language,

thus, continues to develop as it embodies the new social and cultural nations of Jamaica in the age of the 21st century.

## 2.2 Attitudes and Perceptions towards Jamaican Creole

Patrick (2008) notes that creolisation, from a comprehensive viewpoint, led to the establishment of new cultural and social institutions, including language; however, JC has long been perceived as inferior to English – the native language of a meagre minority – and this is still reflected in present-day reality, with consequences for educational, economic, and psychological independence.

Studies on language attitudes towards JC reveal both persistent ambivalence and shifting perceptions. Wassink (1999) examined attitudes in a semi-rural Jamaican community, finding that most respondents (90%) recognised JC as a distinct language due to phonological and lexical differences yet still considered it suitable only for informal settings. Gender and age influenced perceptions, with males aged 20-45 expressing more favourable attitudes than their female counterparts do. A few years later, the Jamaica Language Unit (JLU[ii]) (2005) conducted an island-wide study that found 79.5% of respondents considered JC a language, 68.5% supported its official status, and 71.1% favoured bilingual education with JC and English being used in schools.

Studies that are more recent indicate continued complexities in attitudes and perceptions towards JC. Kuck (2016) investigated the attitudes of Jamaicans towards their language, particularly in relation to non-native speakers, including Christian and foreign English teachers, attempting to speak JC. The study surveyed 161 adult students from the Vocational Training Development Institute (VTDI) in Jamaica and conducted two focus groups – one with long-term expatriates and another with Jamaican students and professionals. Findings revealed strong support for recognising JC as an official language alongside English, though approximately 30% of respondents believed that only Jamaicans or people of Caribbean/African descent should speak it. While expatriates in the first focus group reported limited fluency and occasional mockery when using JC, the second focus group expressed pride in JC as a marker of cultural identity but displayed ambivalence toward foreigners speaking it, citing concerns about cultural appropriation. Tucker and Murphy (2023) examined the attitudes of Jamaican heritage speakers in Toronto toward JC heritage language education (HLE). Participants generally valued JC as an important cultural resource and expressed a desire for their children to speak it. However, they were divided on whether JC could be effectively taught, with some arguing that its similarities to English made instruction feasible, while others believed that key elements such as the JC accent and its "flavour" could not be formally taught (p. 72). There was a general reluctance toward formal classroom-based JC education, with a preference for social and community-based language learning methods instead. Notably, while JC speakers were resistant to structured education in JC for themselves, they were more open to formal instruction for non-JC learners interested in Jamaican culture.

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[ii]The JLU is located on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, in Kingston.

Admittedly, attitudes toward JC have improved due to several factors. The 1989 call by the National Association of Teachers of English (NATE) to endorse JC in schools reflected an institutional shift, while the rise of Dancehall music reinforced its presence in popular culture (Wassink, 1999). Jamaica's Language Education Policy also recognises Jamaica as a bilingual country, which retains English as the official language of instruction but advocates for the oral use of the home language (JC) in schools alongside English (Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, 2001, p.4). However, Davids (2013) argues that students are forced to be taught in their secondary language (English), with which many of them struggle. For this reason, several linguists have called for English to be taught from a second-language perspective or a bilingual approach to be taken (Williams, 2019). Bryan (2004) highlights political changes, the decline in native English speakers, and the increasing use of JC in homes and schools as contributors to its rising status. Linguists and writers have also worked to promote JC, and younger generations show a more relaxed approach to its use, indicating greater acceptance over time (Sand, 2013).

However, despite increasing recognition, JC has historically held a low status due to colonial, social, and political factors. English, established as the official language during colonial rule, was associated with power and prestige, while JC, often referred to as Patois – a derogatory French term, was perceived as traditionally the language of the poor (Pollard, 1994). Preston and Robinson (2005, p. 1) suggested that language attitudes are shaped by social perceptions – if a group is seen as "*decent, hard-working, and intelligent,*" their language is viewed positively, whereas negative stereotypes contribute to the devaluation of non-standard varieties like JC. Politically, English continues to dominate government, commerce, and formal education, and there has been little action from the government towards granting JC official status (Sand, 2013). Although JC is not an endangered language, Ward *et al.* (2024) argue that the time is suitable for the Jamaican Government and other policy stakeholders to accord just recognition to it, especially as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has declared the decade 2022 to 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, which seeks to preserve, revitalise, and promote indigenous and less commonly taught languages (UNESCO, 2023).

## 2.3 Linguistic Features of Jamaican Creole

The validity of JC as a language has been widely debated by both linguists and non-linguists, with some arguing that it is a dialect and not a language (Williams, 2020) and others describing it as 'bad' English (Davids, 2013). JC occupies an important role in Jamaica's vibrant and ever-evolving sociolinguistics (Devonish & Carpenter, 2020). Although many argue that JC does not possess the characteristics of a language, Patrick (2008) details the linguistic elements that make it recognisable as a language, including orthography and syntax. Davidson and Schwartz (1995) explain that JC exists on a continuum, ranging from more familiar to less similar to English. Patrick (2019) labels these stages as acrolect (variations closest to English), basilect (variations furthest from

English), and mesolect (variations in between), even though some mesolectic variations stand independently (Meade, 2001). Table 1 illustrates an example of all three categories.
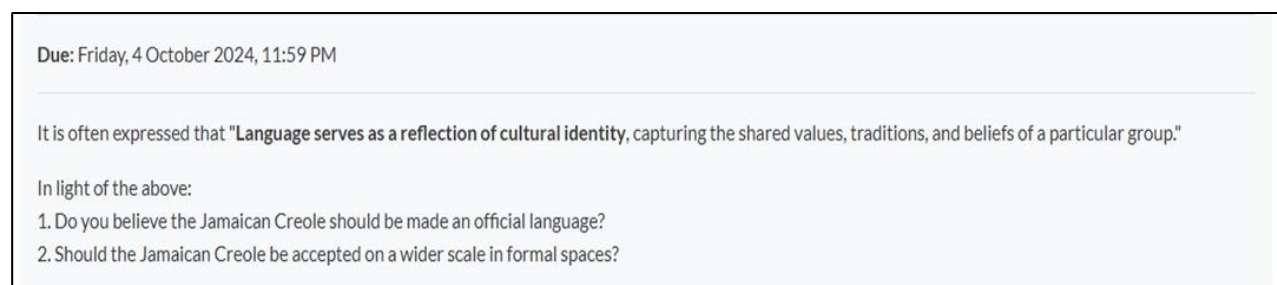
**Table 1**. Examples of 'I am eating the food that they gave me'
on the Jamaican language continuum (Armstrong *et al.*, 2022)

| Category | Example |
|----------|---------|
| Acrolect | *"I'm eating the food that they gave me."* |
| Basilect | *"Me a nyam di bickle weh dem gi mi."* |
| Mesolect | *"Me a eat di food weh dem gi mi."* |

Debates persist concerning a formal writing system of JC, even though the JLU has done extensive work in developing a standard. Notwithstanding, many Jamaican Creolophone speakers utilise orthographic patterns that reflect their phonological understanding and preference for JC, which create numerous variations (Madden *et al.*, 2024). However, while these disparities do not necessarily affect oral comprehension, they can pose problems in written communication. Nevertheless, the Cassidy model has been adopted in many formal publications, including the translation of the New Testament Bible in JC – *Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testiment*.

## 3. Methods

The present study reports on a corpus of 20 (14F, 6M) students who shared their perceptions of the officialisation of JC and its usage in formal spaces through a forum (see Figure 1) they responded to on Moodle in semester 1 of the academic year 2024-2025. The corpus was obtained from the course Academic Literacy for Undergraduates (ALU) – COM1024 – a general education module done at the University of Technology, Jamaica. Students were given the forum to complete at the end of unit II of the course – Language and Writing – as part of their module engagement requirement. Unit II focuses on structural differences between JC and Standard Jamaican English (SJE). The study employs thematic analysis to analyse the data collected. Dawadi (2020) describes thematic analysis as a qualitative research method that is used to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets, which are usually in the form of text or transcribed interviews. King (2004) notes that it entails the identification of themes through meticulous reading and reading of the data.

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It is often expressed that "**Language serves as a reflection of cultural identity**, capturing the shared values, traditions, and beliefs of a particular group."

In light of the above:
1. Do you believe the Jamaican Creole should be made an official language?
2. Should the Jamaican Creole be accepted on a wider scale in formal spaces?

**Figure 1**: Forum questions on students' perceptions of Jamaican Creole

## 4. Results and Discussion

The data is comprised of individual student responses, each providing arguments for or against the formal acceptance of JC as an official language and its usage in formal contexts. Students provided detailed reasoning and justification for their stance. Some responses also included personal experiences, observations about the use of creole and suggestions for balancing both English and JC in Jamaican society. The following were the major themes that emerged from the corpus: cultural identity and heritage, language standardisation and practicality, communication effectiveness, educational implications, social perceptions and professionalism, and inclusivity versus exclusivity.

### 4.1 Cultural Identity and Heritage

A prominent recurring theme is the link between JC and cultural identity. Many students argue that making JC an official language would recognise and celebrate their heritage, possibly improving national pride and togetherness. However, some express concerns that emphasizing JC might outshine English, which holds a significant position in international communication.

**Excerpt 1:**

*"Yes, I believe Jamaican Creole should be made an official language. It truly reflects the history and culture of the Jamaican people. Making Jamaican Creole an official language would help to increase its status as a language as well as its importance, which would remove the idea that it is an inferior language and spoken by uneducated people."*

**Excerpt 2:**

*"Language is not only used for communicating for everyday purposes but is also used by persons to express themselves, giving an insight into who they are, their personality and identity. Jamaican Creole had a unique creation; it was formed due to the blending of many languages from around the world, which gave us Jamaicans a way to communicate and express ourselves in a rough time period. As Jamaicans, when we travel [abroad], we are identified by the way we speak; persons are often excited to speak with us to hear how we speak, and try and speak the language as well. This is why I believe Jamaican Creole should be made an official language so other regions could be taught the language and accept Jamaican Creole as another language, further spreading the Jamaican identity across the world."*

**Excerpt 3:**

*"Yes, I think that the Jamaica Creole should be considered an official language as a way of preserving cultural identity and as a means of expressing inclusivity in the nation."*

**Excerpt 4:**

*"I do believe that the Jamaican Creole, also known as Patois, should be recognised as an official language. Jamaican creole serves as a primary means of communication amongst the people of the island when it comes to day-to-day communication in informal settings, i.e. with family, friends and other social interactions. It serves as a major cultural symbol of the Jamaican people. We can see its influence globally through social media, where you may come across people that are actively trying to learn Jamaican creole as well as cultural exchanges."*

**Excerpt 5:**

*"It is definitely a reflection of our cultural identity. Time and time again, the use of Jamaican Creole in creative spaces (such as in art, music, theatre, etc.) has adequately captured what it's like to feel and be **Jamaican**. A majority of the island speaks Jamaican Creole anyway, so why not incorporate it as an official language? Not to mention international folks seem to already accept it as an official language because whenever we speak Creole, they say we are speaking 'Jamaican'."*

**Excerpt 6:**

*"I do believe that it should be an official language alongside our official language now, which is Standard English. Many people speak Jamaican Creole on a day-to-day basis, but it is only when we are in a professional setting that we speak in Standard English. Making Creole one of our official languages will bring awareness and acknowledgement that Creole is indeed a language and not a dialect, as many people around the world would describe it. Creole is a part of our identity as Jamaicans, and as people, when we speak Creole, we feel a sense of pride and joy…"*

**Excerpt 7:**

*"I believe that Jamaican Creole should be made an official language because language is closely related to identity, and as the quote states, reflects values, tradition, and belief in a people. Jamaican Creole is no less a medium of primary communication for the vast majority of Jamaicans than it represents a very important part of national identity, history, and culture. The government would, therefore, be validating its importance by recognizing it as such, while that fact alone plays into the hands of preserving cultural heritage."*

**Excerpt 8:**

*"Jamaican Creole is an important part of Jamaican culture. Recognising it officially will affirm the language's unique linguistic heritage. Jamaicans use this language to form a cultural identity, which can be seen in the use of music and media (dancehall and reggae). Making JC an official language would recognise it as being one of Jamaica's contributions to the global stage."*

**Excerpt 9:**

*"Allowing Creole in formal settings also sends a message that it's a valid, respected language. It could boost cultural pride and make people feel more connected to their heritage. Of course, English still plays an important role, especially for interacting with the rest of the world, so it's important to find a balance where both languages are valued and used appropriately."*

## 4.2 Language Standardisation and Practicality

Concerns were raised regarding the challenges of standardising JC. Those who are not in favour of officialisation cite the variations in the spelling of JC, arguing that this lack of normalisation could impede its use in formal settings where clarity and consistency are necessary. However, those in favour of officialisation suggest that standardisation is achievable, and the advantages of recognising JC officially outweigh the challenges.

**Excerpt 1:**

*"Formal spaces often rely on clarity and uniformity to avoid miscommunications. As a Jamaican, I sometimes have a hard time reading and interpreting the dialect and I also may have times where I miss the actual meaning of a statement or word that is being used. If Jamaican Creole is used in formal settings, there might be people like me who struggle to understand it, likely leading to conflicts, misunderstandings, inefficiencies, and a lack of professionalism, among other issues. With that being said, English being widely used would still be necessary in many global and formal contexts. Although Jamaican Creole is connected to the overall cultural identity, self-expression and everyday communication between one another, I believe it should be kept as just for use in informal settings and not be fully classified as a language."*

**Excerpt 2:**

*"The problem with these spellings and forms is that most Jamaicans are unsure of the spellings of the words they speak themselves. And when writing or typing their own dialect, instead of correcting to a centralised and accepted spelling for each word, they accept the different spellings as long as they are able to sound it out for themselves. It can be said that we Jamaicans speak a language we don't write and write a language we don't speak. Conclusively, until Jamaica comes together to declare a formalised and widely accepted dictionary for these words, the Jamaican Creole is unsuitable to be considered a language, especially in formal settings."*

**Excerpt 3:**

*"While Jamaican Creole (Patios) is a fundamental aspect of the country's rich culture and identity, I believe it should not be made an official language for several important reasons, one being that Jamaican Creole lacks a standardised written form. There is a significant variation in how it is spoken across regions and communities. Making it an official language would require a formalised structure, including spelling, grammar rules, and*

*vocabulary. This process could take years to implement and may face resistance from the public."*

### Excerpt 4:

*"Jamaican Creole has no standard structure because it has many varieties, both as it relates to the regions and education levels of the people that use the dialect. It follows the Creole continuum, so creating a standard would be difficult. Also, Jamaican Creole is one that I would consider ever-changing and complex, so creating a specific criterion for the language would make it not as authentic and cultural."*

### Excerpt 5:

*"The Jamaican Creole is an important part of our cultural identity, but I do not believe it should be made an official language. It is not expansive enough, meaning that there are minimal words in the vocabulary. Languages should be able to translate to each other with minimum loss of meaning. However, when translating to Jamaican Creole, the full meaning will be lost due to the lack of vocabulary. The Jamaican Creole also has no standardized grammar."*

## 4.3 Communication Effectiveness

Some students question whether JC is an effective means of communication in all contexts. Arguments for its use highlight its accessibility to many Jamaicans, potentially improving communication within the community. However, those who oppose express concerns about its use in formal contexts or with non-native Jamaican speakers, arguing that it could create communication barriers.

### Excerpt 1:

*"No, I do not believe that Jamaican Creole should be made an official language mainly because Jamaican Creole may restrain international communication. It is very challenging for individuals from other countries to understand Jamaican Creole, so the best choice is Standard Jamaican English. It can also affect education, especially if the correct resources are not provided."*

### Excerpt 2:

*"Accepting Creole in formal spaces shows a sense of pride. Most persons feel more comfortable expressing themselves in Creole. Acceptance in formal spaces would reduce the stigma as some people see it as bad language."*

### Excerpt 3:

*"…I think that it should be accepted in formal spaces, especially in Jamaica, where it is most likely to be understood. I do not believe anyone should be restricted in the language that they use."*

**Excerpt 4:**

*"No, I do not believe Jamaican Creole should be accepted in more formal spaces. I do not think the Creole language would fit in the formal space. In my opinion, the language itself sounds mostly informal. In a lot of cases, where one thing is said but is really referring to something completely different, it is very prominent in the Jamaican Creole. Take, for example, the video we watched when the man said, "tek i flour". Plain and simple, that means that someone took flour, but what he was really saying is someone took dumplings. It is those ambiguities in the Jamaican Creole that make it unsuitable in more formal spaces."*

**Excerpt 5:**

*"Yes, I believe Jamaican Creole should be accepted on a wider scale in formal spaces. This is because there are a lot of Jamaicans who are not fluent in speaking Standard English but can express themselves using Creole; also those who are good at speaking Standard English can also speak and understand Creole pretty well."*

**Excerpt 6:**

*"English is Jamaica's official language and is the primary language used in Jamaica. Making Jamaican Creole an official language might cause there to be barriers to communication as it comes to communicating among others (globally). Language involves structured rules, such as grammar and syntax, which allows individuals to understand and be understood by others."*

**Excerpt 7:**

*"Jamaican Creole should be an official language as it is a system of communication my fellow Jamaicans use to communicate with one another on a daily basis. Granted, depending on where in Jamaica you are from, it may be difficult to understand what your fellow countryman is saying, but it is still a means of communication, and eventually, you will come to understand what they are saying. For this reason, I wholeheartedly believe that Jamaican Creole should be made an official language."*

## 4.4 Educational Implications

The role of JC in education is an important theme. Students in favour of it advocate for its use in education to enhance learning for students more comfortable with Creole, potentially improving literacy rates and bridging the gap between home and school languages. Those who oppose it warn of potential confusion and challenges in integrating it into the existing educational structure.

**Excerpt 1:**

*"Making Jamaican Creole an official language would recognise it as an important part of Jamaican identity. Creole is a big part of everyday life for many people in Jamaica and reflects their culture, history, and way of thinking. Official recognition would give it the*

*respect it deserves, especially as it's a language many Jamaicans grow up speaking. However, there are challenges. English is already the official language and is used in schools, government, and business. Switching or adding Creole as an official language would require changes in the education system, legal documents, and public services. It could be expensive and difficult to manage."*

**Excerpt 2:**

*"I believe that Jamaican Creole should be accepted on a wider scale, but not within formal spaces as, firstly, Jamaican Creole or Patois can actually serve as a language barrier. What I mean by a language barrier is that due to some Jamaicans who are not fluent in Standard English, [they] may have challenges or less access to certain services, legal rights and educational resources."*

**Excerpt 3:**

*"…one of the strongest arguments against making Jamaican Creole an official language is its potential impact on education. This could lead to confusion and complexity for students, especially when trying to master both languages for formal and informal use."*

**Excerpt 4:**

*"Yes, Jamaican Creole should be more widely accepted in formal settings, but in a balanced way. In places like schools, government offices, and media, Creole could make things more accessible for the many Jamaicans who are more comfortable in their native language. For example, using Creole alongside English in classrooms could help students learn better since they wouldn't have to struggle to understand everything in a second language."*

**Excerpt 5:**

*"Making Jamaican Creole an official language could help in making education easier by reducing the language barriers in school. This is because children learn better when they are able to use their mother tongue without any discrimination. In early childhood education, many young children grow up speaking JC at home, and when they reach higher education, they are taught in JSE, a language they are not quite comfortable with. Learning in JC could help students to grasp concepts more easily, thus improving literacy and education."*

**Excerpt 6:**

*"…if we acknowledge Creole in educational and public institutions, we could make information more obtainable mainly for those who find it difficult to speak English."*

**Excerpt 7:**

*"I believe Creole should be accepted in formal spaces such as schools, business etc, as Creole is Jamaica's history. Additionally, the involvement of both languages, English and Creole,*

*could be used with a balanced approach of both, as I believe it would enhance communication between individuals."*

## 4.5 Social Perceptions and Professionalism

The prevailing social perceptions of JC are a central discussion point. Some students advance that its use in formal settings could challenge existing biases and elevate the language's status. However, those who disagree with its inclusion worry that using JC in formal spaces might be seen as unprofessional, potentially hindering opportunities for Jamaicans.

**Excerpt 1:**

*"…in formal environments, Patois is often viewed as unprofessional, and those who primarily use it may be unfairly judged or looked down upon. I believe that the use of Standard English is often seen as a marker of competence or status. While this bias exists, I don't believe that Patois should be entirely excluded from formal spaces. There are instances where code-switching between Patois and Standard English could be beneficial when speaking in a formal space, especially to build a stronger connection with peers and colleagues from similar backgrounds."*

**Excerpt 2:**

*"It is also viewed by many as informal or unsuitable for professional settings. Making it an official language would likely require a massive shift in public perception and changes to business, government and legal procedures."*

**Excerpt 3:**

*"Formal spaces such as government institutions, courts, schools and corporate environments rely on a clear standard of communication. English, as the official language, is well-established in these settings and upholds a level of professionalism and clarity that is recognised both locally and internationally. Introducing Creole into formal spaces could blur the lines between informal and formal language use, potentially diminishing the perception of professionalism."*

**Excerpt 4:**

*"I have had my doubts about Jamaican Creole becoming an official language because of the stigma surrounding it. People, and from what I've witnessed, mostly Jamaicans themselves, have been shaming the language, associating it with the 'ghetto' and painting it as unprofessional. Honestly, I can see why people would say this, but… I do believe the Jamaican Creole should be made an official language."*

**Excerpt 5:**

*"I think that there will be many challenges when it comes on to accepting Jamaican Creole in a formal space. One of the main reasons that Jamaican Creole should not be accepted on*

*a wider scale is because, in a formal context, it is seen as being disrespectful. Standard Jamaican English is much more suitable for meetings and corporate events so that clear communication can be maintained, especially if it includes international members. It is challenging for tourists to understand Jamaican Creole, so it is best if Standard Jamaican English remained as a formal language."*

**Excerpt 6:**

*"Yes, it should be because it is only in a professional setting. We speak Standard English because we want to be seen as a professional individual, and when anyone is speaking Standard English, we tend to get nervous and start to talk gibberish because we feel as if we are going to mess up. If Creole is used in a professional setting, we will feel at ease and not nervous where communication will flow, and the speaking of Creole won't be seen as being unprofessional. This will also give people who don't live in Jamaica a chance to learn to read, write, and speak Creole so that they won't feel left out when Jamaicans are having a conversation."*

**Excerpt 7:**

*"While Jamaican Creole is a language, I do not believe it should be made official because it cannot be used in every situation, as it will sound improper, especially in formal spaces. It has traditionally had no acceptability in official and formal contexts since it was commonly referred to as a low-status dialect in the past. While it is not commonly referred to as a low-status dialect today, I still believe Jamaican Creole is more suited for casual use than in formal spaces."*

**Excerpt 8:**

*"I do believe that Jamaican Creole should be an official language. I, however, do not agree that it should be accepted in formal spaces; this may seem contradicting, but I will further explain why this is my view. I am Jamaican and I have always thought that Jamaican Creole is vulgar; do not get me wrong, I do speak creole; however, I only speak it in acceptable settings, such as among my peers and any other informal setting. Once I am in the presence of a superior or in any formal setting, I would be speaking Standard English. It is important to remember that Jamaican Creole is broken English, and because of this simple fact, it should not be accepted in any formal setting. Speaking Jamaican Creole in any formal setting is distasteful, unprofessional, and shows that the individual lacks the proper education. This is my opinion. I have no issue with Jamaican creole; I, however, am of the notion of time and place, and it is my view that Jamaican Creole has no place in any formal setting."*

## 4.6 Inclusion Versus Exclusion

There is a tension between inclusivity and exclusivity. Proponents emphasize that embracing JC would be more inclusive to many Jamaicans, while those against suggest that prioritising JC might exclude non-Creolophone speakers.

**Excerpt 1:**

*"Yes, Jamaican Creole should most certainly be accepted on a wider scale in formal spaces. This also would promote inclusivity, as well as help better communication, as people would be able to reach the understanding of a larger scale of Jamaicans who may not fully understand Standard English, on important issues, thus contributing to the society."*

**Excerpt 2:**

*"Yes, I do believe Jamaican Creole should be accepted on a wider scale in formal spaces. As far as I've seen, many Jamaicans grow to understand patois, and if the people understand it then we should use it. For example, serious information needing to be dispensed to rural civilians who are more familiar with patois than anything. It would be better to communicate using patois to ensure everyone understands exactly what is happening."*

**Excerpt 3:**

*"If we remove the stigma surrounding the use of Jamaican Creole and instead embrace the language, I can see it becoming an official language, and if not that, at least being more acceptable in formal settings. A time fi wi tap oppress wiself."*

**Excerpt 4:**

*"…There is a stigma attached to persons speaking Creole, meaning that persons who speak Patois are part of the uneducated bunch that can't speak English. Making Creole one of our languages will put an end to this stigma and promote linguistic equality."*

**Excerpt 5:**

*"I believe we should open di gate fi Jamaican Creole. The mere fact that we hear our Creole language on the big screen, all over the world should let us know that we should be proud of our language and make it official. This is our culture and is a part of our identity as Jamaicans. Accepting it in wider spaces will allow us more inclusivity and open di gate fi more opportunities for fi wi people and fi wi country."*

**Excerpt 6:**

*"Currently, Jamaica's official language is English, and while this is spoken in formal, government and business settings, Patios is the widely used language spoken by our Jamaican people. Additionally, I believe this creates a gap between some persons, as not all Jamaicans are proficient in Standard English. People may feel free to speak their original language in official, legal, and educational settings. Creole should also be presented as much more than just a dialect but show it as a language with its own structure, grammar, and cultural significance."*

**Excerpt 6:**

*"It may even be inclusive, given that many citizens are more fluent in Creole than in Standard English, now adopted as Jamaica's official language. Furthermore, it would also*

*make it official and give it a certain status that may perhaps promote its development in both education and the media, enhance literacy, and be more accessible to those people who feel more comfortable with Creole."*

**Excerpt 7:**

*"Jamaican Creole should be accepted in more formal areas. As much as English is needed for international relations and for more formal communications, and even some legal matters, Jamaican Creole can be used more effectively in local government and even education. Allowing its inclusion in formal settings, for example, in the courts of law and parliament, would grant an individual the right to express themselves in a language with which they are most comfortable. This would be an even further step toward ensuring an inclusive society and not standing in the way of a speaker of Jamaican Creole for some reason related to a language barrier."*

## 4.7 Cultural Preservation and Promotion

Although this is not a major theme, some students spoke of the importance of JC towards cultural preservation and promotion.

**Excerpt 1:**

*"Recognition of the language could help to preserve and promote Jamaican Creole, ensuring its use in the future. An example of this would be our neighbouring country, Haiti, where they have made both Haitian Creole and French official languages. By doing this, the language has been preserved and promoted."*

**Excerpt 2:**

*"Yes, I think that Jamaican Creole should be made an official language. Some reasons for why I say it should be are: Creole is part of what makes Jamaica the country that it is today. You can say that it's part of the country's identity. Making it an official language authenticates its importance and cultural relevance. Another reason is: We all know that language plays a vital role in preserving history and culture memory; if we acknowledge Creole as an official language, we can preserve it for future generations."*

The findings from the corpus show that students hold mixed views concerning the officialisation of JC and its acceptance in more formal spaces. Several students highlight the connection between JC and cultural identity and heritage, noting that the language is embedded everyday life, and making it official would enhance national pride and unity. This supports the view of Shamuratova (2020), who states that the mother tongue is a model of unity and solidarity of a nation, illustrating its pride spirit. Parajuli (2021) argues that language as a social interactional tool plays a crucial role in shaping cultural identity and helps frame people's linguistic and cultural backgrounds to share their personal experiences, social realities, cultural norms, and historical traditions among citizens, thereby creating an enriched socio-cultural life within a country. Priya (2019) emphasizes

that language is not only a communication tool but also an instrument that establishes a person's or nation's identity and uniqueness from another. It is the 'mechanical glue' that unites a country through social bonds. Davids (2013) confirms that the linguistic data on JC holds that it has a valued function as part of Jamaican heritage. JC helps locals to identify with and embrace their 'Jamaikaness', as expressed by one student: "*…the use of Jamaican Creole in creative spaces… has adequately captured what it's like to feel and be Jamaican.*" Therefore, given that "*a majority of the island speak Jamaican Creole,*" there is merit in making it an official language.

Language also plays a significant role in cultural preservation and promotion. Navare (2013) emphasizes that any language is an inseparable part of culture and evolution. She argues that language and literature are essential to express culture and preserve and perpetuate that expression across generations. The decline of language will lead to cultural loss and gradual extinction. As one student wrote, "*Recognition of the language could help to preserve and promote Jamaican Creole, ensuring its use in the future.*" Another student supports this by noting, "*We all know that language plays a vital role in preserving history and culture memory; if we acknowledge Creole as an official language, we can preserve it for future generations.*"

Some students are also in support of JC becoming an official language and for it to be accepted in more formal spaces as it would promote inclusion in educational institutions and at other State agencies. Bokova (2012) advocates for children to be taught in a language that they can understand, as this is crucial for them to enjoy their right to quality education. She underlines that mother tongue and multilingual education are necessary to reduce discrimination, promote inclusion and learning outcomes, and champion social justice. In fact, Devonish and Carpenter (2007) found that Jamaican children who were taught in a pilot bilingual project were capable of acquiring literacy in both JC and English simultaneously and could readily distinguish between the two language varieties both orally and in writing. This suggests that bilingual education holds potential to enhance literacy levels in Jamaica. Consequently, a more deliberate and structured integration of JC into the primary school curriculum from a policy level would provide greater access and accommodation to Creolophones and reduce inequalities, as seen in countries like Curaçao, Haiti, and Seychelles where Creole has been formally integrated in their bilingual or multilingual context. However, this accommodation should be extended beyond educational institutions to include the broad spectrum of the justice system. Brown-Blake (2017) highlights that in Jamaica, English is the language of the legal system, but many Jamaicans who interact with this system lack proficiency in English. She proposes that bilingual approaches be institutionalised in the justice system to enhance understanding of discourse in legal settings by vernacular speakers with inadequate English proficiency.

However, despite support for JC, some students have disapproved of it obtaining official status and being accepted in contexts that are more formal. One of the primary reasons is due to a lack of orthographic standardisation, as several Jamaicans use their personal phonemic awareness to spell words in JC. Opponents believe this can be a

barrier to effective communication and can interrupt and cause confusion in the education system in which English is the official language of instruction. Additionally, some believe that mastery of JC would not be beneficial internationally and could create a communication deficit, as foreigners would struggle to have seamless communication with many Jamaicans. Furthermore, some argue that the use of JC should be limited to informal spaces as it is "unprofessional" and can hinder opportunities for Jamaicans. These views show the prevailing social perceptions of JC, often associated with the uneducated and less affluent strata of society. These opinions correspond with sociolinguistic theories, such as linguistic imperialism and hegemony, which speak to the dominance of one language over another, thereby resulting in the marginalisation of speakers of subordinated languages (Al-Kahtany & Alhamami, 2022).

Notwithstanding, JC remains a widely explored language internationally, and foreigners are usually inclined to learn more through musical genres such as reggae and dancehall. Some universities in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America have courses in JC and Jamaican heritage. Further exposure and promotion can be achieved through telecollaborative projects such as the ones organised between Jamaica and France (Madden *et al.*, 2024ab; Madden, 2022; Madden & Ashby, 2021).

Interestingly, the ambivalence in many of the responses suggests a personal struggle with self-identity, which is rooted in colonialism. In fact, the situation is not unique to Jamaica, as several post-colonial literature books highlight similar issues in other Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean Islands, as well as various parts of Africa. Some responses present conflicting views: on the one hand, students call for the officialisation of JC, but on the other hand, the same students do not believe it should be accepted into spaces that are more formal. However, an official language cannot be discriminated against as it is a legally binding language of communication and business. English is considered a language of prestige and intellectual competence. However, creole languages like JC encompass strong cultural, ecological, historical, and scientific knowledge. This knowledge is not only important for the language communities they serve but also for the sum of all human knowledge. Beyond the unit on JC in the Academic Literacy for Undergraduates module offered at the University of Technology, Jamaica, students should be encouraged to take the JAM3001 Jamaican Language course, which focuses on structure and usage. Other tertiary institutions, including teacher-training colleges, could take a similar approach to ensure that more students have a better understanding of the intricacies of JC.

## 5. Conclusion

The study used an assignment corpus of 20 students to ascertain their perceptions of JC becoming an official language and whether it should be accepted in spaces that are more formal. Findings show mixed views, with some arguing for its official status and incorporation in educational and legal settings, which would lead to greater access and inclusion. Students highlight that JC forms an integral part of cultural identity and

heritage and, according to its official status, could enhance cultural preservation and promotion. However, others argue that the absence of a known standardised orthographic system presents challenges for the education system and effective communication, especially with foreigners. Additionally, social perceptions and attitudes present challenges for some students, as they believe JC is unprofessional and associated with the less intelligent; therefore, it should not be used in formal spaces. Even though the Cassidy orthographic system has been used to develop materials in JC, it is not widely known by the population. Consequently, universities should create or promote courses on JC for students to have a better understanding of its structure and usage. Future studies could investigate academic faculty's (primarily academic writing and English language) perceptions of JC being incorporated into the curriculum.

It is recognised that the sample size, though providing valuable insights into the intricacies of the linguistic and cultural landscape in Jamaica, is limited; therefore, the findings do not allow for generalisation. As a result, future research could benefit from a larger, more diverse participant pool, incorporating perspectives from different socioeconomic backgrounds and academic disciplines, even across various tertiary institutions. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking shifts in language attitudes over time could offer deeper insights into the evolving role of JC in Jamaican society.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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