Parent and Guardian Perspectives Regarding Attendance: Evidence from a Governmental Early Childhood Education and Care Program

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PARENT AND GUARDIAN PERSPECTIVES REGARDING ATTENDANCE: EVIDENCE FROM A GOVERNMENTAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROGRAM

by

Rita L. Cruz Santelises

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology Western Michigan University April 2020

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PARENT AND GUARDIAN PERSPECTIVES REGARDING ATTENDANCE: EVIDENCE FROM A GOVERNMENTAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROGRAM

Rita L. Cruz Santelises, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2020

In 2013, the Dominican government began the implementation of a national plan called Quisqueya Empieza Contigo (QEC) (Exec. Order No. 102, 2013), aimed to fulfill the needs of children zero to five years old holistically. The National Institute of Comprehensive Care (INAIPI, acronym in Spanish) carries two of the most ambitious programs embedded in this national plan. Early Childhood is the governmental institution authorized to carry out this recent intervention. The intervention has increased coverage of early childhood services through two programs: Programmed Comprehensive Family Care centered on the community (Centro de Atención Familiar e Infancia, [CAFI]) and the Comprehensive Care Centers for Early Childhood (Centros de Atención Integral a la Primera Infancia, [CAIPI]). Studies on issues concerning Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) are very limited in the Dominica Republic (D.R.), and those that have been conducted mostly focus on quantitative outcomes, such as enrollment rates. The purpose of this study was to understand how mothers, fathers, and guardians of students enrolled in Dominican ECEC programs make decisions regarding their children’s enrollment and attendance in the governmental intervention called CAIPI. The overarching research question guiding this study is what influences mothers’, fathers’, and guardians’ decisions about enrollment and attendance in early childhood education for their children.
This qualitative study was conducted in the urban area of the D.R., where the CAIPI centers have operated for at least one year. This study, which was conducted in Santo Domingo and National District, engaged a criterion sample of mothers, fathers, and guardians whose children either have attended to the CAIPI regularly or had low rates of attendance. The 16 participants were recruited based on the distance they live from the ECEC intervention site. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents or guardians per family, and the unit of analysis was low-income families experience using CAIPI.

Findings from this study informed program managers and policy leaders about the central beliefs and expectations that Dominican low-income families have about the CAIPI program. According to these study findings, both low and regular attendance categorized family’s beliefs that CAIPI is important for their children. Also, factors influencing families’ decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI are usually: (a) number of children, (b) distance of the center, (c) money constraints, (d) CAIPI help to find a school for the child, and (e) being a working mother or single mother. Regarding families’ decisions about attendance, most of the participants of this study express that the child’s health is the main limitation for the child to attend CAIPI. Finally, the circumstances that seem to contribute most to children’s attendance to CAIPI are being a single parent and having a job. On the other hand, conditions that often detract from children’s attendance are children’s health and the number of people at home available to take care of the child.

Themes in this study are (a) Program’s relevance; (b) Barriers for attendance; and (c) Child’s wellbeing as the main purpose. Analyzing findings from both Ecological Theory and Social Justice Theory reveals aspects related to the scarcity of resources in which participants of this study and its potential harm to these children’s lives. Other studies are needed to better
understand this and other aspects, such as public policies funding ECEC intervention in the country. Recommendations are twofold. First, considering that research regarding ECEC are limited in the local context, several ideas about studies examining the multidimensional aspects of the system are discussed. Second, some programs and policy recommendations are proposed, given that the holistic ECEC system approach was recently stabilized in the D.R.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank God since without the strength I receive from heaven, I would not be able to thrive in this journey. Also, I would like to acknowledge the participants of this study for sharing their experiences and thoughts with me. My thanks to INAIPI, the institution that is running this fantastic program; it is encouraging to learn that our country has such committed professionals in the ECEC arena. Thanks to my dissertation committee: Dr. Nelson, for her leadership and patience, Dr. Reeves, for believing in this project and Dr. Scheker for improving this project with her knowledge about the D.R. I feel admiration for each of you. I would also like to acknowledge the helpful guidance I received from Mary Ebejer. Also, thanks to my family, friends, co-workers, and colleges, knowing the high expectations they all have about me cheered me up through this journey. Special acknowledgments to my husband Juan, who has been supporting me from the beginning, often having more faith in me than myself. Thanks to my beloved son Juan Diego. My baby, many times, this personal milestone kept me away from you. I hope that someday you will be able to forgive me.

Rita L. Cruz Santelises
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The first three years of children’s lives are critical for their healthy growth and development; as such, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is essential to the adequate development of any child (Campbell et al., 2012; Pashi, 2011). There are several approaches around the world to address the ECE needs of children. While early childhood is defined as the stage of life between zero to eight years old, many of the intervention programs that focus on the adequate development of children are designed for children up to five years of age. Typically, these interventions are classified by the child’s age. For example, programs for children from zero to three years old are usually grounded in care and social interactions, while programs for children from three to five years old are typically grounded in formal learning activities, mostly known as early childhood education, such as Head Start. Programs seeking to address both cognitive stimulation activities and care for children under six years old are frequently called Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) interventions.

Most countries experienced a rise in ECEC services in the 1970s when ECEC principally referred to official programs included in schools or kindergartens (four-to-five-year-old children). Programs serving younger children (under four years old) were labeled as childcare and were mostly considered not educational.-ECEC interventions also are classified by how countries manage them, either as divided or unified models. Adlerstein and Pardo (2017) explained that the divided model is prevalent in Latin American Countries (LAC), where education and early childhood care are distributed into diverse public and private organizations, including non-government organizations (NGOs). While the unified model is consolidated into a
governmental institution or ministry (e.g., Ministry of Education or Ministry of Health), with coordination among and between entities. Currently, Colombia and Chile are the LACs that best exhibit the features of a unified model.

Evidence from research has shown that a specific type of model could help the efficient function of the system. Gomez’s (2014) qualitative study involved seven members of the Early Childhood Advisory Councils from Massachusetts and ten from Pennsylvania. Gomez used semi-structured interviews and found that consolidated Governance methods have common forms, which produce efficient ways to run the ECEC system. Other ECEC arrangements could be labeled formal and non-formal. Often formal arrangement refers to a traditional center-based structure, such as childcare or pre-primary education classrooms with educational activities, while non-formal arrangement refers to community-based sites with minimal educational activities and outcomes (Adlerstein & Pardo, 2017). Figure 1 presents the main classification of ECEC interventions.

![Figure 1. ECEC interventions](image-url)
Some countries also developed the ECEC platform based on networks of services. The networks are suitable for creating trust, which is what families need to leave their young children with a caregiver. These networks of services are usually composed of: (a) families, (b) social workers, and (c) community institutions. Another element that contributes to an efficient network is the support of social work professionals. According to Kahn (2014), social workers’ unique perspective adds vastly to ECEC programming, mostly regarding social justice, which is the practice of thoughtfully distributing scarce resources and creating more efficient services (Gambrill, 2007). Kahn explains that since ECEC services are usually limited, access to the benefits of these kinds of programs is not always available for every child.

The three main approaches for ECEC programs are (a) family-based intervention, (b) school-based interventions, and (c) centered-based intervention. Family-based interventions are offered by a home visitor in the family home and focus on the family’s acquisition of best practices regarding parenting. For school-based interventions, ECEC programs are often incorporated into the first two grades of school (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten). Finally, Center-based programs are offered in a facility and focus on children’s early learning outcomes.

Two main elements often classify Center-based ECEC services. First, the length of the school day and school year and, second, the number of years that early childhood education is offered (Sommer et al., 2017). For instance, most centered-based ECEC services offer pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, but others only provide kindergarten. Most countries highlight increasing children’s enrollment in center-based programs and the establishment of national curricula as critical features of ECEC (Pardo & Adlerstein, 2016). The present study seeks to understand what factors influence ECEC enrollment and attendance for families that have access to ECEC in a centered-based program in the Dominican Republic (DR).
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Programs

ECEC programs were created to provide holistic support to children, especially low-income children, because international institutions, like the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2012), have highlighted that the first years of life are essential in children’s development. At this stage, children develop the ability to think, speak, learn, and reason. Participating in an ECEC program during this time can have significant implications for children’s academic performance in the future (Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2015). In addition to helping children develop their intellectual capacity, ECEC experiences can also contribute to shaping social values and behaviors that will benefit them through to adulthood (Cortazar, 2015).

For example, in their mixed-methods study, Widener and McIntyre (2012) surveyed 86 general education students, their parents, and teachers in the United States. The researchers found a correlation between children who had attended a particular type of early education program, like pre-kindergarten programs in public schools and fewer problem behaviors. Those who attended pre-K programs also had more positive student-teacher relationships in the first months of kindergarten than children who did not participate in pre-kindergarten programs in public schools. ECEC programs can also play a crucial role in increasing children’s physical, psychological, verbal, emotional, and social development (Maundeni, 2013). In this period of a child’s development, critical mental processes take place, and those processes are highly responsive to the nature of a child’s day-to-day experiences. ECEC programs are designed to provide children with an array of experiences to help develop language, mental processes, emotional well-being, psychological development, and social interactions (Campbell et al., 2012).
ECEC services are especially vital for children raised in contexts where poverty and other conditions often result in developmental delays compared to children raised in affluence or other privileged circumstances (UNESCO-IBE, 2006; Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2015). These delays for children from low-income families increase the likelihood that a child will be academically behind at the beginning of kindergarten (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). ECEC can be a robust mechanism for breaking the cycle of poverty for children around the world (Arnold, 2004). Research indicating the positive long-term impact of ECEC is so well established that the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded a public and private investment in the first years of life translates into one of the most potent social equalizers available for government action (Direccion General de Programas Especiales de la Presidencia [DIGEPEP], 2013). For these reasons, many countries have incorporated ECEC systems into their strategies (Gabel & Kamerman, 2006).

Regardless of the global recognition of the importance of ECEC programs, progress in access, enrollment, attendance, and quality of ECEC systems is still a challenge in many countries (UNESCO, 2015). Enrollment and attendance are particularly relevant to address in some contexts where either public or private institutions offer ECEC interventions (Greenberg, 2011). Unfortunately, both the challenge of getting children enrolled in available ECEC programs and achieving regular attendance after enrollment are significant issues in many high-poverty environments, both rural and urban (Habibov, 2012; O’Connor et al., 2016). There are studies, however, that provide clues to factors that can influence enrollment and attendance. For example, Liang, Fuller, and Singer (2000) found that after controlling for household income, mothers who value learning school-related skills are more likely to enroll their children in ECEC programs because the programs are consistent with their parenting practices. Liang et al.’s
quantitative study analyzed data from 3,624 mothers of 3- to 5-year-old children in the United States. The researchers studied economic and social factors at the family level that influence the probability of parents choosing center-based care. Liang et al. used the National Household Education Survey (NHES) and found via the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) model that a well-educated mother is more likely to select center-based care. Also, the researchers point out that parents from all ethnic groups who engage in practices related to early literacy development, participate in educational activities with the child, and regulate television viewing are more likely to select center care. Others features like cost, convenience, safety, provider characteristics, teacher, and educational activities including support for children’s language development, are all critical factors when choosing and committing to a childcare program for their pre-school age children (Brown, Girio-Herrera, Sherman, Kahn, & Copeland, 2013; Marcella, 2014). Thus, several factors influence families’ decisions regarding enrollment and attendance of their children in ECEC programs. Additionally, the factors that influence variations in attendance rates may be more explicit or nuanced depending on the population, location, and cultural context.

**Background**

The Dominican Republic (D.R.) is an island located in Central America Insular and is part of the Great Antilles. It is the second-largest island in the Great Antilles after Cuba. The D.R. has 31 provinces, and one National District (Oficina Nacional de Estadistica [ONE], 2019). Table 1 presents the primary demographic information about the province, where the current study is situated (Sistema Unico de Beneficiarios [SIUBEN], 2015).
Table 1. *Site intervention’s demographic information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Santo Domingo</th>
<th>National District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,109,497</td>
<td>408,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>223,063</td>
<td>214,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>214,237</td>
<td>193,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>334,041</td>
<td>126,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household ICV 1</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household ICV 2</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household ICV 3</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household ICV 4</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>10.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth registration rates</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (write and read)</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sistema Unico de Beneficiarios [SIUBEN].

Quality of Life Index (Indice de Calidad de Vida, [ICV]) describes the household quality of life according to the national data collected by the Unique System of Beneficiaries (SIUBEN, acronym in Spanish), which is the institution responsible for developing the ICV of the household. As seen in Table 1, 50.1% of households in Santo Domingo and 46.5% of households in the National District fall into ICV one and two (SIUBEN, 2015). The measurement of poverty is derived from a multidimensional approach, which combines different characteristics of the home, the household, and its members. Based on these factors, an ICV is generated that assigns household scores on a scale that varies from zero to 100. It is recognized that a household has more considerable deficiencies as its ICV approaches zero, and its quality of life increases as ICV approaches 100.
In the D.R., the holistic implementation of the ECEC system was not addressed comprehensively until 2012 (Exec. Order No. 491, 2012; Exec. Order No. 102, 2013). Before that, the country had a divided model, as mentioned earlier (Adlerstein & Pardo, 2017). As a result, the D.R. has two types of ECEC programs: private and public. ECEC private interventions often offer the entire preschool cycle for ages zero to five. They also provide complete care and education for children who attend. Before 2014, public ECEC programs in the D.R. were more limited.

The ECEC public interventions that were established before 2013 and remain in place today operate through three main approaches. First, the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educacion, [MINERD]) offers school-based facilities embedded in public schools across the country. These programs often provide only the last year of early childhood education (pre-school) for a target population of five-year-old children. The second public option, which is managed by the National Council of Children’s Shelters (Consejo Nacional de Estancias Infantiles, [CONDEI]), operates under the Dominican Social Security System (Sistema Nacional de la Seguridad Social, SDSS). CONDEI was established in 2002. This intervention, called Administrator of Children’s Home for Safe Health (Administradora de Estancias Infantiles Salud Segura, AEISS), offers comprehensive care and education to children under five years old. The third public option available before 2014, Spaces of Hope (Espacios de Esperanza, [EPES]), is an Early Childhood Development (Desarrollo Infantil Temprano, [DIT]) network intervention that seeks to promote early childhood education for children three to four years old. The D.R.’s vice-president manages the EPES option. All told, there are currently 68 centers around the D.R. dedicated to providing a healthy and stimulating environment for infants and young children by attending to five essential aspects of child development: (a) socio-emotional, (b) cognitive, (c)
physical and psychomotor, (d) language and communication, and (e) the health and well-being of the child.

While the three pre-2012 programs described above continue to operate, the Dominican government decided to launch an ambitious strategy to fight extreme poverty and promote social inclusion called Quisqueya without Misery (Quisqueya Sin Miseria, [QSM]). Starting in 2012, the D.R. government launched this strategy by initiating three additional primary programs: (a) Quisqueya Learns with You (Quisqueya Aprende Contigo, [QAC]), which aims to eliminate adult illiteracy in the country; (b) Quisqueya Begins with You (Quisqueya Empieza Contigo, [QEC]), which seeks to expand the ECEC system in the D.R.; and (c) Quisqueya Is All of us (Quisqueya Somos Todos, [QST]), which is designed to promote economic growth and inclusion through local development.

QEC expanded the range of coverage and quality of the national ECEC system through a set of comprehensive care strategies intended to help children under five years old, their families, and communities (DIGEPEP, 2013). The National Institute of Comprehensive Care for Early Childhood (Instituto Nacional de Atención Integral a la Primera Infancia, [INAIPI]) is the governmental institution authorized to carry out this newly expanded ECEC platform. The intervention increases the availability of early childhood services through two programs: Programmed Comprehensive Family Care centered on the community (Centro de Atención Familiar e Infancia, [CAFI]) and the Comprehensive Care Centers for Early Childhood (Centros de Atención Integral a la Primera Infancia, [CAIPI]). The stakeholders for these two initiatives include (a) low-income children from birth to five years old as the target population; (b) low-income parents of the children targeted as beneficiaries; (c) intervention staff who serve as
program conductors; (d) governmental leaders who carry out the interventions; and (e) policymakers who could offer long-term policy instruments. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2. INAIPI interventions

Table 2 presents the D.R.’s enrollment rate of the public and private ECEC interventions for the school year 2017-2018, according to the administrative data from the MINERD. The school administrator in a customized software Educational Management System (Sistema de Gestion Educativa de la República Dominicana, SIGERD) registers this information. It is important to mention that there is a tendency to not register children under three years old in the ECEC programs in the schools for the MINERD. Therefore, data for children under three years old might not be complete. As can be noted, the private sector programs have the most significant percentage of children under six years old in attendance, followed by the early education public classrooms, which cover mostly five-year old children.
Table 2  *ECEC enrollment by intervention school year 2017-2018*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Under 6-years-old Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEI-SS</td>
<td>3,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPES</td>
<td>2,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAIPI</td>
<td>15,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private schools</td>
<td>169,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools</td>
<td>115,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-official sector</td>
<td>6,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>312,477</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIGERD

All ECEC programs have some challenges to face, such as access, attendance, infrastructure, and quality (UNESCO, 2015). These challenges are especially tricky in the D.R. because there is little understanding of whether the government initiative to provide ECEC programs is making a substantial impact on the target population. Evidence from research points to attendance as one of the most significant issues to address in ECEC interventions (Ehrlich, Gwynne & Allensworth, 2018; Habibov, 2012; Sommer et al., 2017). For example, Habibov (2012) found that poverty and lack of education are obstacles to ECEC attendance and utilization in Central Asia. In order to better understand the factors that inhibit and encourage ECEC participation, there is a need for a study that captures the opinions, beliefs, and perspectives that inform the decisions of mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in ECEC. This study, which focuses on the CAIPI intervention, attempts to better understand what influences parental
decisions regarding their children’s participation in a government-sponsored early childhood education intervention program.

**Problem Statement**

In 2013, the Dominican government began the implementation of a national plan, called Quisqueya Empieza Contigo (QEC), aimed to fulfill the needs of children zero to five years old holistically. QEC was conceived as one of the critical actions in the plan to fight extreme poverty in the D.R. (Exec. Order No. 102, 2013). The purpose was to expand the range of coverage and quality through a set of comprehensive care programs aimed to help children from zero to five years of age, their families, and communities (DIGEPEP, 2013). The National Institute of Comprehensive Care for Early Childhood (INAIPI, acronym in Spanish) is the governmental institution authorized to carry out this intervention.

The intervention has increased coverage of early childhood services through two programs: CAIPI and CAFI. In the context of the D.R., there is little understanding of whether the government initiative to provide ECEC programs is making a substantial impact on the target population. One reason may be that, while INAIPI’s data reveals increases in CAIPI enrollment status, the average attendance rate is less than 70%. Although data from recent reports show a gradual increase in attendance rate, absenteeism is still a significant concern because such low attendance rates could be a significant factor influencing the degree to which these programs achieve their intended impact.

**Literature Deficiency Statement**

Studies on issues concerning ECEC are very limited in the D.R., and those that have been conducted mostly focus on quantitative outcomes, such as enrollment rates. These quantitative studies have shown persistent low rates of enrollment for low-income students in the Dominican
ECEC program. While such studies raise the question of why vulnerable families have low ECEC participation levels, little is known about the factors that influence low-income parents’ decisions regarding enrollment of their children in ECEC programs. In order to better understand the factors that inhibit and encourage participation and patterns of attendance, further study is needed to capture the opinions, perceptions, and influences that shape the parents’ decisions and actions relative to enrolling their eligible children in the CAIPI programs.

Additionally, current data shows persistently low attendance rates for children from low-income families once those children enroll in CAIPI center programs. However, like the data on enrollment trends, further study is needed to understand the factors that contribute to low daily attendance rates (still under 70% according to 2017 data) for the children who could benefit most from regular attendance, i.e., children from low-income families. This is a significant gap in the knowledge about how the CAIPI program is responding to the needs of low-income families. While there are many aspects of the Dominican context for early childhood education that need further study, a basic understanding of how economically challenged parents to think about and act upon attendance decisions once they enroll their child in an early childhood education program could be an essential foundation for raising and answering additional questions for further study.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to understand how mothers, fathers, and guardians of students enrolled in Dominican ECEC programs make decisions regarding their children’s enrollment and attendance in the governmental intervention called CAIPI. This study attempts to better understand what influences parents’ and guardians’ decisions to enroll their children in early childhood education and what influences the patterns of attendance they establish for their
children once enrolled. Through this examination, I also hoped to gain insight into what might influence parents and guardians to ensure that their children attend consistently.

The overarching research question guiding this study is: What influences mothers’, fathers’, and guardians’ decisions about enrollment and attendance in early childhood education for their children?

The four sub-questions are:

1. How do mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention describe the importance of the program?
2. What factors influence families’ decisions regarding enrolling and sending their children to a CAIPI Center program?
3. How do mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enroll in a CAIPI intervention program make decisions about their child’s attendance?
4. What are the circumstances that contribute to or detract from their child’s attendance?

**Significance of the Study**

This study will provide a voice for low-income families to help shape how the Dominican government designs early childhood programs and communicates with the target population about them. Information gathered from parents provided a better understanding of their decisions regarding the attendance of their children who are younger than age five and qualify to enroll in an ECEC program. Also, this study could provide valuable information for policymakers about this program, as it seeks to understand both enrollment and attendance patterns of the children in the program through the perspectives of the people who make those decisions, i.e., parents and guardians. Consequently, it could serve as an instrument to improve the intervention. Finally,
experts could use findings from this study to address the limitations and increase knowledge about the target population that may not be currently understood (Marcella, 2014).

**Conceptual Framework Diagram and Narrative**

Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework for this research, which is to understand the experiences of low-income families using a government approach to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the Dominican Republic (DR) called Comprehensive Care Centers focused on Early Childhood (CAIPI, acronym in Spanish). This research is embedded in two theories, Social Justice Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Social justice, which is defined as a reasonable and impartial distribution of resources (Van den Bos, 2003), also embraces the values of inclusion, equal access, and equal opportunity (Hage, Ring & Lantz, 2011). As a researcher, I am positioning myself within the social justice philosophical perspective, since this theory focuses on elevating underserved and underrepresented populations and giving voice to marginalized populations. My study is focused on how one particular population takes advantage and makes use of this ECEC program as a government-sponsored intervention to address the marginalization and underserved circumstances of Dominicans living in poverty.

Also, since I am working with parents of very young children, and this program is designed to intervene at the most opportunistic developmental stages of children’s lives, I also decided to utilize the Ecological Systems Theory as an additional frame for my study. Ecological Systems Theory describes how the environment (family, community, and culture) influences a child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner’s theory explains that four systems influence child development. First, the child develops within a global environment, called the macrosystem. Second, the child lives within an exosystem composed of the community, society, and culture. Third, the child directly experiences the mesosystem, which is composed of family
and school. Fourth, the child is himself, a microsystem consisting of emotional, cognitive, and biological systems. According to the theory, each layer of the environment affects a child’s development (Ryan, 2001).

I used that theory as part of my lens I for understanding what parents describe to me as their reasons for enrolling their children in the CAIPI programs and to understand the patterns of attendance these families establish for their children. Since the CAIPI Centers are positioned within the layers of macro, exo, and mesosystems, it is reasonable to expect that the child’s parents and guardians are also making decisions for the child within and influenced by those same systems’ layers. Thus, this study attempts to delve into the various influences that the parents may derive from all of those layers.

In addition to those two theories, my study is also informed by some of the significant findings of studies on the influence of ECEC programs and patterns of attendance in similar populations. These findings particularly informed how I framed both my research and interview questions. My research is also informed by the national data that highlight how children from zero to five years old have been underserved for many years. Also, an ongoing data collection process from the institution that carries out this program (INAIPI) informs my study. With those influences, I focused my inquiry on the attendance patterns of children enrolled in CAIPI programs. The diagram in Figure 3 below illustrates both the programmatic model for the Dominican ECEC initiative and the theoretical and conceptual frames I employed to address the problem of identifying what either encourages or inhibits parents from taking advantage of the services offered by the program for their pre-school aged children.
Figure 3. Conceptual framework
Methods Overview

This qualitative study was conducted in the urban area of the D.R. where the CAIPI centers have operated for at least one year. This study engaged a criterion sample of mothers, fathers, and guardians whose children either have attended regularly or had low rates of attendance. Parents were recruited based on the distance they live from the ECEC intervention site (not more than five kilometers). The first 14-16 mothers, fathers, and guardians who met the inclusionary study criteria and agreed to consent were accepted for this study. Once I received consent from the participants, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with one parent or guardian per family. I interviewed in Spanish, as this is the native language for the participants. The interview protocol was piloted with four mothers, fathers, or guardians of enrolled children in CAIPI younger than five-years-old before conducting the full study, and the unit of analysis was low-income families’ experience using CAIPI.

Chapter 1 Closure

The purpose of this study is to understand families’ barriers to achieving regular attendance at a center-based governmental intervention in the D.R. known as CAIPI. I wanted to understand the factors that inhibit or encourage participation in this governmental program. Finding from this study could assist in ECEC program designs or could help revise public policy concerning early childhood education and care. Also, it could inform education leaders of the core values of low-income families and the expectations they have for their children. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature with a focus on both the Dominican and broader context for early childhood care and education.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study attempted to understand how low-income families in the Dominican Republic (DR) make decisions about Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for their children under five years old. It focused on a particular government-funded ECEC called CAIPI. Considering that this type of program was not well established in the D.R. until 2014, the literature review begins with the importance of ECEC for the adequate development of children everywhere. The next section presents the main challenges these programs often face. Then, I present how families often make decisions about the enrollment and attendance of their children in ECEC programs. The subsequent section presents a snapshot of ECEC programs in the D.R. The last part explains how the literature review informed the present study, as well as explains the role of theory in my study.

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Benefits of ECEC Programs

The early childhood period has had rising visibility in public policies around the world. According to UNESCO (2010), children growing up in environments with a risk of undernourishment, mistreatment, violence, anxiety, and lack of cognitive stimulation are affected by circumstances that negatively impact their ability to learn, as well as their social and emotional skills. Children who attend preschool have considerably better performance on mathematical and geometric tasks compared with children who did not participate in preschool (Aslan & Aktaş Arnas, 2015). Joining preschool programs has also been related to reducing levels of physical violence for children whose mothers reported low levels of educational attainment (Dinehart, Katz, Manfra, & Ullery, 2013).
Previous research suggests that kindergarten preparation can help children and their families. For instance, Widener and McIntyre’s (2012) quantitative study involved 86 five-year-old students, their principal caregivers, and their kindergarten teachers (14 women) in the United States. The researchers explored the link between kindergarten preparation variables, early education experiences, and family participation in preparation activities on children’s socio-behavioral outcomes in kindergarten. Through a correlational design that examined child-parent reports of child and family demographic information, the researchers found that kindergarten preparation could benefit families of children with socio-behavioral risk issues. Hence, ECEC programs had a positive effect on families and children by increasing their readiness for kindergarten.

Several other studies have emphasized the long-term benefits of early childhood programs for the adequate development of all children, especially children from low-income families (Dulay, Cheung, & McBride, 2018; Hasan, Hyson, & Chang, 2013). The International Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted results that indicate participation in ECEC is strongly related to reading performance at 15 years old (OECD, 2013). Campbell et al. (2012) conducted an experimental design of 101 (52 treatment group; 49 control group) 30-year-olds who had participated in the Abecedarian Project, a randomized controlled experiment conducted in 1976 in the United States. In this longitudinal study, the researchers found via survey and semi-structured interviews that at the age of 30, participants continued to show evidence of the positive effects of early treatment on their educational attainment with the treated participants 4.6 times more likely to have achieved college degrees than those in the control group.
Studies in Latin American countries (LAC) have also shown a positive impact of ECEC on child development. Attendance in ECEC interventions, such as Crèche in Brazil, were positively related to cognitive ability, social-emotional, and motor development (Baumeister, Rindermann, & Barnett, 2014). These changes could be because the center-based intervention at Crèche has trained personnel to engage in developmentally appropriate activities with each child. Furthermore, children who attended ECEC scored higher on average (12.8 points [0.23 SD] in math, 10.7 points [0.19 SD] in reading, and 9.4 points [0.18 SD] on fourth-grade SIMCE test in social sciences) than those who did not attend any ECEC. Thus, this study found that ECEC programs in Chile have a substantial long-term effect on children’s academic achievement, even when controlled for covariates such as parents’ education. Therefore, ECEC has been shown to provide both short and long-term benefits for children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite the benefits that ECEC programs offer to young children, these programs in the D.R. and around the world continue to face challenges related to funding, quality, enrollment, and attendance.

**Challenges in ECEC**

ECEC programs often face barriers that limit their potential impact. Richter et al. (2017) highlighted that ECEC programs face essential funding challenges. Similarly, quality had been a significant challenge for ECEC programs in some countries, due to being underfunded (Richter et al., 2017). Actually, some low-income countries do not have budgets to fund early childhood education (Ige, 2011). Recent research findings have shown that low-quality ECEC programs do not produce the desired future academic outcomes and can harm the adequate development of the child (Britto, Yoshikawa, & Boller, 2011; Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2015).
McCoy, Salhi, Yoshikawa, Black, Britto, and Fink (2018) in their quantitative study that involved 163,000 three- and four-year-old children from 63 low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) presented descriptive statistics that show important differences in the provision of basic early learning opportunities to young children across these counties. The researchers found that other factors, such as poverty, malnutrition, and limited investment in education, harms learning. Other researchers have shown that millions of children under five years old in LMIC are in danger of not achieving their potential due to poverty (McCoy et al., 2018; Richter et al., 2017). ECEC could help to balance this issue since by providing resources that might help children living in an at-risk environment.

Also, international institutions such as the World Bank (2016) have pointed out that many children under five years’ old who live in LMIC have cognitive and social delays in development. In addition, most early childhood programming is inappropriate for children with special needs or does not meet the needs of children under three years old (OECD, 2006). So, these children remain at risk even when they do attend. Thus, even though governments around the world have made a substantial effort to establish ECEC programs for young children in the last decade, the literature indicates a persistent inconsistency in the quantity and quality of these educational facilities (McConnell-Farmer, Cook, & Farmer, 2012).

Similarly, deficiencies in the infrastructure and services in educational organizations have been a pervasive problem in low-income countries, such as Nigeria (Ige, 2011). According to UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, some ECEC lack appropriate equipment and materials, as evidenced by the absence of junior toilets and inadequate facilities for children with special needs (Maundeni, 2013). As a result, mothers express concerns about cost, convenience, safety, provider characteristics, teacher, and educational activities and support for children’s language
development when choosing a childcare program (Marcella, 2014). Challenges in ECEC are diverse since they are often rooted in complex and specific regional and even country characteristics. The next subsection presents the major challenges of ECEC programs.

Quality

Quality ECEC programs are essential for these interventions to have the desired effect on children’s lives. Quality ECEC is associated with teacher preparation and instructional practices that include: (a) playing (b) reading, and (c) family and community practices. However, many low- and middle-income countries do not have sufficient staff trained in education nor the standard curriculum for ECEC programs. Studies have also raised issues related to the competencies of ECEC staff. For instance, many ECEC program staff members admit they are not prepared to respond confidently to children with special needs, such as those with disruptive behaviors (Dinehart et al., 2013). Recent international evaluations focused on the importance of teachers as a primary factor influencing the quality of ECEC programs (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2012; UNESCO, 2015). Other studies, however, show that many countries struggle to find or develop enough qualified early childhood teachers for those programs (Ige, 2011).

Another element that relates to staff competencies is teaching practices. According to Nag, Snowling, and Asfaha (2016), literacy instruction in low- to middle-income countries often focuses on orthographic knowledge and draws less attention to storybook reading and meaning-making. Reading to a child has been positively associated with child development. McKie, Manswell, and Green (2012), in their evaluation of a pre-kindergarten incentive program in Washington, DC, found via observation that reading to children every day contributes to the development of children’s curiosity and ability in reading. Thus, increasing the number of high-
quality pre-K classrooms will help to meet international standards for improving academic achievement.

Today, the use of technology as a tool for teaching practice is common in almost every classroom regardless of participants’ age. Blackwell, Lauricella, and Wartella’s (2014) study analyzed survey data from 1234 U.S. early childhood educators working with children from zero to four years in the fall of 2012. Blackwell et al.’s study used path analysis to examine barriers to technology integration in early childhood education. The researchers found that teachers with more experience use technology more often. Blackwell et al. also found that teacher confidence played a significant role in shaping attitudes toward the value of technology. As a result, the staff’s professional capital influenced their decisions about the use of the computer in early childhood education environments.

The array of activities developed in ECEC intervention also contributes to child development. It is well known that play-oriented environments are often related to teaching practices in ECEC intervention. Several scholars have pointed out the importance of play in those interventions (DiCarlo, Baumgartner, Ota & Geary, 2016; Williams, Sheridan, & Sandberg, 2014). DiCarlo, Baumgartner, Ota, and Geary (2016), for example, in their quantitative study of 63 preschool-aged children in United States, found via recording procedures and observations that there was a statistically significant difference in mean teaching strategies for length of attention during toy play (Wilk’s Lambda = .59, F[2, 59] = 20.33, \( p < .000 \), multivariate = .41). The condition in which the child is presented with the toys/objects is connected to how long the child engaged in toy play. Follow-up linear contrasts showed a significant effect with means decreasing as the condition decreases in choice (F [1, 60] = 39.01, \( p < .000 \), partial = .39). According to these findings, children attend longer in toy play when they
could make a selection. DiCarlo et al.’s (2016) study suggests that for the children engaged for a long time playing, the teacher should let them make their choices of toy/object. Moreover, even though previous literature has suggested that choice is important, this study differentiates between two types of choice: child’s and adult’s choice. The play is a common practice at ECEC interventions.

The use of play as an instruction activity has been increasing across countries, especially in those with recognized high-quality ECEC intervention. As an example, Ahlcrona (2012), in his qualitative study of 20 children aged 3–5 in Sweden, offers a new angle on the practice of using puppets in preschool activities, which includes a theoretical perspective on a puppet’s potential for adding children learning and communication. Ahlcrona showed how a puppet’s verbal interactions encouraged and inspired children to participate in imaginative play, which is crucial for preschool children’s social and artistic development. The author highlighted the characteristics of the puppet as a useful instrument for communication and learning and described the puppet as a useful communication tool for children in the preschool environment. Some scholars also explained that through play, the children accomplish both cognitive and development goals (Sounoglou & Michalopoulou, 2016). Playing activities are usually the cornerstone of ECEC interventions, even if ECEC teachers do not use it as a pedagogical activity.

Finally, the type of program could influence quality. Bassok, Fitzpatrick, Greenberg, and Loeb (2016) studied associations between care type and quality using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study’s Birth Cohort (ECLS–B), a nationally representative study carried out by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that tracks 14,000 children from infancy in 2001 through kindergarten entry in the United States. The researcher found that
children registered in informal ECEC programs underperform academically compared to their peers enrolled in formal interventions. They emphasized that formal ECEC programs provide “higher quality care across a wide variety of programs and caregiver measures” (Bassok et al., 2016; p. 1,643). According to the researchers, in order to assure quality in ECEC intervention programs, a national commission focusing specifically on early childhood development should regulate the intervention based on international standards.

**Access**

Worldwide access to ECEC programs is vastly different from country to country. For example, while less than 20% of children in low-income countries have access to pre-primary education (Neuman & Hatipoglu, 2015), high-income countries, such as Finland, have almost universal coverage to ECEC services. However, access to high-quality infant and toddler care is challenging for low-income families due to economic limitations (Lowe & Weisner, 2004). For instance, Maundeni (2013) conducted a literature review using a content analysis approach and found that only a small sample of poor children had access to ECEC in Botswana. The researcher found that the three main reasons for lack of access were: (a) the government does not have a direct role in the establishment of ECEC; (b) there is a low budget for this kind of initiative, and (c) there is a belief that childcare is a “mother’s job” (p. 56). According to Maundeni (2013), some of the issues of Botswana’s ECEC system are resource limitations. Therefore, Maundeni highlighted recommendations from previous studies that emphasize the importance of offering community-based programs. Furthermore, excluding children from ECEC denies them the opportunity to gain additional academic benefits (Maundeni, 2013). According to UNICEF (2007), only 17% of children eligible for ECEC programs in Botswana have access to them.
These limitations challenge countries’ capability to provide access to ECEC services for the most disadvantaged population. As a result, countries around the world have used many strategies to provide access to ECEC programs. One of the most common strategies to provide access to ECEC services is offering subsidies to families for them to access ECEC interventions. However, evidence from research shows a mixed picture regarding the effectiveness of such strategies. While some studies found that school readiness in low-income children is positively associated with attending subsidized center-based childcare (Forry, Davis, & Welti, 2013), other studies, on the other hand, have shown that subsidies were negatively related to reading and reading scores (Hawkinson, Griffen, Dong, & Maynard, 2013).

Similarly, Johnson, Martin, and Brooks-Gunn (2013) conducted a quantitative study involving 1,400 4-year old children in the United States. They used data from the 2010 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort to study if subsidies were associated with school readiness. The researchers used child-care settings, school readiness, cognitive skills, family backgrounds, and subsidy recipient in regression models and found that receiving subsidies was not associated with children’s reading outcomes. Hence, caution has to be taken when using subsidies as a strategy to provide access to ECEC programs. Considering two facts, first, governments often use these strategies and second, the subsidies systems in the D.R. has been growing along with established governmental social programs, it is important to monitor the evolution of ECEC programs in the country.

Another strategy used to increase a family’s access to ECEC interventions is lowering the age of admissibility. Van Huizen and Plantenga (2018) studied the Spanish ECEC reform seeking to expand access to universal preschool education, lowering the age of eligibility for governmental-funded interventions from age four to age three. Using a cost-benefit analysis, the
researchers found that high-quality ECEC interventions reliably yielded more positive effects. Also, results showed that children benefit more in the cognitive than in the non-cognitive development area.

**Enrollment**

It is not enough to guarantee access to ECEC programs; children have to be enrolled in the program for them to receive the services. Luckily, data from UNESCO (2015) shows the progress on ECEC interventions and highlights the rise of enrollment in more than 60 countries around the world. However, under-enrollment is still a significant concern in many countries, particularly for children from low-income families, due, in part, to parents’ beliefs that enrolling their children in pre-schools is pretentious and a waste of money (Ige, 2011).

Parents’ beliefs have a significant influence on their decision to enroll their children under five years old in ECEC programs. For instance, findings from other research indicate that parental commitment to their child’s participation in ECEC services increases children’s accomplishments and adaptation (OECD, 2006). Additionally, studies have shown that people who live in remote zones view ECEC centers as places where children go for meals rather than for learning experiences (Bar-On, 2004). Therefore, families could base their decisions on enrollment and attendance of children under five-years-old on these factors. Therefore, in order for families to enroll their children into ECEC programs, they must recognize the importance of it in their children’s comprehensive development.

Factors other than parents’ beliefs also influence families’ decisions regarding ECEC enrollment. For example, in her quantitative study Greenberg (2011) analyzed data from 7,373 children under six years old who were not yet in kindergarten by the time 2005 National Household Educational Survey (NHES) was conducted in the U.S. Greenberg found via
multilogic analysis that maternal education is a significant predictor of children’s enrollment in ECEC programs. She found more than a 60% increase in ECEC registrations among children whose mothers were highly educated for children aged zero to five years old. For those aged zero to two years old, enrollment in ECEC was also related to household income level.

Similarly, Yesil Dagli and Jones (2012), in their quantitative study of 15,779 children who were in the kindergarten for their first time in 1998-1999 school year in the United States, found via analysis of the survey used to the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), 1998-1999 that kindergarten enrollment status of children varied considerably by gender, race and family SES. The percent of children with late enrollment was significantly higher for the White racial group (7.8%) than it was for those from a Black (4.9%), Hispanic (4.9%), or Asian background (5.5%; $\chi^2=15075.18, p<.001$). The percentage of delayed registered children from higher SES families was higher than the percentages of those from lower SES families ($\chi^2=10789.29, p<.001$). The authors explained that children with late enrollment had more robust mathematics skills than those with on-time enrollment, who had stronger skills than children with early registration. However, this pattern of relationship appeared to be dissimilar for children from the lower socio-economic background and racial minority groups by their gender.

Likewise, Dulay, Cheung, and McBride (2018) studied the associations of different factors: (a) socio-economic status (SES), (b) home literacy environment (HLE), (c) preschool attendance, and (d) parental self-efficacy (PSE) with children’s early language and literacy development. The study, which involved 673 children and their families from Cebu City, Philippines, found that, based on national surveys, three- and four-year-old children who were not enrolled in preschool programs were perceived by parents to be too young to go to school.
However, the same study highlighted that this view contradicted the conviction that early preschool attendance helped with school readiness skills (David & Albert, 2012).

A family decision to enroll their child in ECEC could also be influenced by external sources. For example, Brown, Girio-Herrera, Sherman, Kahn, and Copeland (2013), in their qualitative study of 27 low-income parents in the United States, found via in-depth semi-structured interviews that parents frequently took advice from family or friends regarding their ECEC choices. Parents were open to getting ECEC guidance during child visits with pediatricians and valued feedback from their pediatricians about child readiness for ECEC, but they feared that their children would be neglected in ECEC settings. Thus, many of them avoided ECEC before three years of age (Brown et al., 2013). Private preschools have taken a higher percentage of these interventions since 2000 since the shortage of ECEC governmental interventions (UNESCO, 2015).

Children with special needs are particularly at risk of school failure. The at-risk population is more likely to start behind and experience school failure at the beginning of kindergarten (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Additionally, international organizations such as Programa de Promoción de la Reforma Educativa de América Latina y el Caribe (PREAL) (2006) have shown that academic success is linked to the probability of children becoming contributing members of society.

However, for Latin American countries (LAC), this goal is not easy to achieve equally since ECEC’s enrollment patterns are very dissimilar between countries. While enrollment in ECEC interventions raised significantly after 2002 in some southern LAC, such as Argentina (from 21% to 66%) and Chile (46% of 80%), enrollment in some central and insular countries in the region, such as Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic,
remain less than 50% (Adlerstein & Pardo, 2017). This gap could be explained by the lack of a unified approach to ECEC among LAC.

**Attendance**

Another issue to address is attendance because if children are enrolled but do not attend, they will not reap the benefits of an ECEC program. Several studies have found that even when parents enroll their children in ECEC, actually attending the program is yet another matter (Ehrlich et al., 2018; Sommer et al., 2017). According to Sommer et al. (2017), it is critical to highlight that programs only have an impact when children attend regularly and gain early learning experiences that can help them in the future. Similarly, chronic absenteeism has been negatively associated with attendance rates and academic outcomes through second grade (Ehrlich et al., 2018). Therefore, incentives for enrollment are not enough, and the family must recognize the importance of ECEC for their children.

Many factors can influence children’s pre-school attendance, such as the difference in values and approaches to ECEC (Fenech, Giugni, & Bown, 2012) and the length of the distance from the families’ household to the preschool services (Baxter & Hand, 2013). Family characteristics related to higher absenteeism also include: (a) poverty, (b) single and teen motherhood, (c) low maternal education, (d) maternal unemployment and child characteristics related to absenteeism often include weak child health and behavior problems (Yoshikawa et al., 2015). Children living in the most deprived areas are half as likely to attend preschool compared to their peers living in the most privileged regions (O’Connor et al., 2016). Finally, the type of center can impact attendance with nonparticipation in center-based childcare and education being predictive of higher absenteeism (Yoshikawa et al., 2015).
Goldfeld et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study involving 261,147 children in their first year of full-time schooling in Australia. Goldfeld et al. (2016) used logistic regression and found that children who did not attend preschool had higher odds of being developmentally vulnerable despite if they live in more advantaged communities (OR 5.24, 95% CI 4.77-5.75) or more disadvantaged communities (OR 2.05, 95% CI 1.84-2.28). Which means Similarly, Cortázar’s (2015) quantitative study, which involved 86,518 children in the Chilean ECCE program, with a treatment group comprising 31,947 children, who attended a public ECCE program before kindergarten, and 54,571 children who did not participate in any ECCE program. Cortazar used propensity score procedures and found that there is a statistical difference between the means of both fathers’ primary education (t=-20.12) and mothers’ primary education (t=-29.20) and participation in ECCE. Furthermore, children who attended ECCE scored on average 12.8 points (0.23 SD) in math, 10.7 points (0.19 SD) in reading, and 9.4 points (0.18 SD) in social sciences higher than those who did not attend any ECCE. Thus, this study found that ECCE programs in Chile have a substantial long-term effect on children’s academic achievement, as measured by fourth-grade SIMCE tests and controlled by many covariates, such as parents’ education.

As can be seen, ECEC challenges are diverse across regions and countries. ECEC has complicated challenges that include multiple layers, such as government regulations. The root of these challenges may lie in ECEC policy planning, including a lack of technical leadership for ECEC and weak relationships to regional and national ECCE networks (Vargas-Barón, 2016). Also, many of these challenges are related to the scarcity of resources. As a result, low- and middle-income countries have to prioritize other interventions instead of ECEC interventions. One way or another, these challenges limit the ability of ECEC programs to provide the desired
effect on children. However, ECEC has been receiving attention in recent years due to the strong international evidence demonstrating the extraordinary results that these interventions could produce. Nevertheless, challenges such as quality, access, enrollment, and attendance still remain, as do barriers ECEC enrollment and attendance, such as families’ perceptions about the importance of ECEC programs.

**Families’ Role in ECEC Participation**

Diverse factors might influence families’ decisions about ECEC; many of these are related to family culture and beliefs. Ige (2011) explained that there might be cultural factors that influence parents’ decisions regarding ECEC for their children; some of these cultural factors are related to children being taught in their mother tongue instead of English. Other factors also have an impact. For example, Marcella (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study that involved interviewing and observing 26 households (10 Family Childcare and 16 Infants Center); 493 12-month family survey sub-samples were interviewed (213 Sub-Samples home visiting group and 280 comparison group); 483 24-month family survey were interviewed; and finally, 28 mothers participated in semi-structured interviews. Through the semi-structured interviews, Marcella found that mothers’ beliefs of some factors like cost, convenience, safety, provider characteristics, teacher, educational activities, and the ability of the children to communicate with their parents about what happens in the program were essential to their choices of child care program. Also, this study revealed that family childcare programs offered features that permitted higher caregiver ratings, like smaller group size, and a mixed age group.

Another recent quantitative study explored the relationship between parenting behaviors and developmental delays in LMIC (Uwemedimo, Howlader, & Pierret, 2017). The study participants included 74 caregiver-child pairs (Six to 60-month-old children) attending the clinic
Hospital Provincial Francisco Gonzalo (HPFG) in La Romana, the Dominican Republic between June and July 2015. The researchers used the Malawi Developmental Assessment Tool (MDAT) (Gladstone et al., 2010) and the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) Household Level Survey Questionnaire (UNICEF, 1999). Uwemedimo et al. (2017) found via multivariate logistic regression that children who were disciplined by spanking have five times higher odds of having language delays (AOR: 5.04, 95% CI: 1.13-22-39). To worsen the situation, Uwemedimo et al. (2017) explained that children from LMIC tend to be exposed to conditions that contribute to developmental delays such as: (a) undernutrition, (b) improper medical care, and (c) parents with both low-education level and lack of parental practice.

Both of these factors also shape children’s future achievement, families’ engagement in learning activities with their child, and families’ commitment to their child participation ECEC. Nelson’s (2005) quantitative study analyzed 14,880 U.S. kindergarten children for a home activities analysis and 10,307 U.S. kindergarten children for a preschool analysis. The researchers used kindergarten assessments and parent and teacher questionnaires from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort database and found that parents who participate in multiple formal and informal learning activities with children regularly provide their children with a strong foundation for future learning. Nelson also found that preschool participation, regardless of the type of program, leads to higher scores on reading and math achievement tests in kindergarten. Similarly, Taguma, Litjens, Kim, & Makowiecki (2012) explained that parental commitment to ECEC services increases children’s achievement and adaptation. These studies highlight helping parents recognize the benefits of the importance of ECEC programs for the adequate development of their under-five-year-olds.
Another important factor that has to be taken into consideration when referring to ECEC intervention is cultural perceptions about the play. For instance, studies have shown that type of interaction is also essential, since an environment where adults do not often kindly interact with their children, considerably reduces brain development (Luby et al., 2013). This was particularly important if the intervention is designed to disadvantage the population since they often dismissed the importance of these activities. Such beliefs could be due to many reasons, one of which is that these adults do not have the time to play a lot during their childhood. As a result, they tend to see play as a waste of time.

**The Dominican Republic Educational Context**

The Dominican Republic is a middle-income country located on an island situated in the Caribbean that it is shared with Haiti. Table 3 below highlights some of the economic and social indicators of the D.R. based on data from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2019) and the World Bank (2018a, 2018b and 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita 2018 [current US$] (World Bank, 2018a)</td>
<td>8,050.6316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth, total 2017 [years] (World Bank, 2017)</td>
<td>73.689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected years of schooling 2018 (UNDP, 2019)</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling 2018 (UNDP, 2019)</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI per capita, PPP 2018 [current international $] (World Bank, 2018b)</td>
<td>16,950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the 2018 Dominican Initiative for Quality Education (IDEC, acronym in Spanish), in the D.R. 33.19% (319,156) of the 961,511 total population of children from birth to
four years old are currently enrolled in comprehensive early childhood care centers and public and private schools. Table 4 presents the breakdown of the ECEC intervention program by number and percent of children served (IDEC, 2018).

Table 4

*D.R.’s Early Childhood Education and Care (EDCE) interventions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INAIPI</td>
<td>180,027</td>
<td>56.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPES</td>
<td>2,742</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDSS</td>
<td>7,953</td>
<td>2.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and private schools</td>
<td>128,434</td>
<td>40.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of 0-4 years old children served</td>
<td>319,156</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IDEC, 2018

In the educational arena, the D.R. participates in many of the international agreements, such as the Agenda for Sustainable Development from UNESCO, which works for education quality, equity, and inclusion. Leading Education 2030 is contained in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015; p. 3). The country also participates in regional agreements such as Metas Educativas 2021 (Education Goals 2021) sponsored by the Organization of Ibero-American States (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos, [OEI]), an international organization that works for social issues in Ibero-American countries.

Education is an essential matter in the country. At the local level, the country has developed various strategies that include education as a cornerstone. For example, Law 1-2012 about National Development Strategy [END] (Estrategia Nacional de Desarrollo, [END]), which is the road map for the country development. Education is one of the main objectives of this law.
The D.R. also has an education law from 1997 (Educational Law 66-97) and two decennial education plans, one for the period 1992-2012 and the recently ended 2008-2018. In 2013, a social movement seeking to raise the national expenditure for education, which resulted in the government and social institutions signing a pact for education. The agreements and commitments assumed in the document aim to achieve an education that allows all Dominicans to develop their full potential as individuals and have access to equal opportunities (Pacto Educativo, 2014). Some of these agreements are: (a) provide high-quality public education from three years old; (b) offer comprehensive early childhood education and care to children under five years old; and (c) enable comprehensive early childhood care near universities and vocational training centers.

The D.R. also participates in international assessments. For instance, in 2013 the D.R. participated in the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo Explicativo, [TERCE]), a large-scale learning achievement survey organized by Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of Quality of Education (Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación, [LLECE]) from the Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (Oficina Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe, [OREALC]/UNESCO). TERCE aims to assess education quality through students’ performance in third and sixth grades mathematics, reading, and writing, and natural sciences (in sixth grade). The study includes contexts and background factors related to the students’ achievement of 16 economies, 15 Latin American countries (LAC), and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon. The total sample includes more than 50,000 students (OREALC/UNESCO, 2016).
Two critical features of TERCE are: test items and questionnaires are culturally adjusted for each country, and the application designed is based on each country, particular curricula, and learning purposes (Delprato, Akyeampong, & Dunne, 2017). According to OREALC/UNESCO (2015), these features allow comparison across both country performance and time, considering that Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE, acronyms as in Spanish) from UNESCO (2006).

According to the national report (Castillo, Díaz & Mola, 2016), D.R. participation in TERCE 2013 involved 8,254 students and 208 schools. Results of TERCE are shown in four performance levels; I is the lowest, and IV is the highest. However, most of the Dominican students are situated in performance levels I and II in the different areas for the two grades. This means Dominican students are below the region’s general average for all domains assessed. In addition to student achievement scores, the TERCE National Report analyzes test scores and context factors, such as the educational expectation of the parents and attendance in early education. The results of the study show that early education attendance has a strong relationship with later academic performance. Finally, less than 20% of the third and sixth-grade students in the D.R. attended early education, while the regional average register that 32.6% of students attended preschool between four and six years of age (OREALC/UNESCO, 2016). So, the D.R. is below the regional average in terms of early education attendance.

In 2014, the Dominican Republic participated for the second time in UNICEF cross-national survey called Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). MICS is known as the most significant international source of statistically comprehensive and universally comparable data on women and children (Gochyyev, Mizunoya & Cardoso, 2019). This survey collects data through face-to-face interviews with family members asking primarily about matters that affect
participants’ life; participants for this study are women between 15-49 years old and children under five years old. For the D.R., MICS 2014 included about 19,981 mothers; from this, 10% were children under five years of age, and 34.7% were under 18 years of age. The national report for the D.R. revealed that 4.7% of children under six months were breastfeeding exclusively. Also, 41.7% of children between 24 to 35-month-old received the complete vaccination recommended schedule before one-year-old (UNICEF, 2016).

Concerning early childhood education, MICS revealed that 39.8% of children between 36 and 59 months of age attend an early childhood education intervention program, and 74.6% of children attending first grade (elementary school) had attended preschool the year before. Fifty-eight percent of children in the same age group developed learning activities with their parents or primary caregiver. However, only 10% of under five years old had more than two books at home, while 56.8% had more than two toys at home. Regarding adequate development, the survey revealed that 84.4% of children between 36 to 59 months of age demonstrated adequate cognitive and social-emotional development (UNICEF, 2016).

In terms of child protection, the survey revealed that 88% of children under five years old have their birth registered. Given the poverty of some areas, 12.8% of children between five and 17 years old perform some form of child labor to help support their families. Corporate punishment is common, with 62.9% of children between one and fourteen years old having experienced psychological aggression and physical punishment during the last month before the survey. MICS showed that the age of marriage is relatively low, with 37.1% of women between 20 and 49 years old reporting being married, legally or not, before 18 years old. Finally, 13% of children between birth and 17 years old did not live with either biological parent. Taken together,
the MICS report suggests that young people are vulnerable to remain in poverty due to the at-risk environment in which they live (UNICEF, 2016).

More recently, in 2015, the Dominican Republic participated for the first time in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a study organized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and conducted since 2000. The study has two main purposes, evaluate student reading, math, and scientific skills, and identify if they have acquired the critical knowledge and skills to participate fully in modern society. PISA 2015 included 15-year-old students enrolled in formal schools (public or private) from 72 countries around the world. To contextualize the results, PISA collects data both at the student level, as well as data on the associated factors provided by the surveys made to parents, teachers, and directors.

According to the national report (León, 2018), PISA in the D.R. targeted all secondary school students (7th grade and up) who were between 15 years and three months old up to 16 years and three months at the time of evaluation. The D.R.’s participation in PISA 2015 involved 194 schools and 4,748 students. For the Dominican students, the average performance in reading was 358 points, compared to the average of 493 points in the OECD countries. In terms of scientific literacy, 15-year-old students in the Dominican Republic scored 332 points compared to an average of 493 for all OECD countries. Similarly, 15-year-old Dominican students scored 328 points in mathematics compared to an average of 490 points for all OECD countries. Only 39% of Dominican children are enrolled in school up to the 10th grade, which is the grade they are supposed to be in at 15 years old. Other studies used PISA data from 2012 and demonstrated that students who participated in early childhood education tended to score better on the test (OECD, 2014). Studies using PISA 2015 data for the Dominican Republic show that students
who attended at least a year of early childhood education performed better than students who did not (Cruz & Morales, 2019).

In 2015, the national education system began the implementation of the new curricular design for Early and Elementary Education based on competencies (Ministerio de Educacion de la Republica Dominicana [MINERD], 2016). This curriculum was tested for the first time with a diagnostic evaluation carried out in 2017 for all third grade students. The National Diagnostic Evaluation for Third Grade was administered in 2017 to 176,772 third-grade students (MINERD, 2018). Its purpose was to assess the language and mathematics students’ competencies established in the national curriculum for that grade. The results of the tests could guide the actions of the different instances of the educational system toward improving both education quality and equity. This evaluation also includes questionnaires addressed to principals, third-grade teachers, and families, which gathered information on the context of the centers and families. This diagnostic evaluation is an achievement assessment. According to the MINERD report (2018), 50% of students are at the elementary level for language, and 44% are at the same level for mathematics. Also, for language, 38% of students that are at the acceptable level and 12% at a satisfactory level. In mathematics, 28% of students are at an acceptable level and 27% at a satisfactory level. The satisfactory level of performance is the one that encompasses the curriculum’ competencies established for that cycle; therefore, there is a significant gap between the intended, the implemented, and the attained curriculum.

Scheker (2018), in her study using the National Diagnostic Evaluation for Third Grade 2017 dataset showed that according to the family surveys, almost 30% of students live with both parents, and more than 30% of students live with one of their parents. Also, families reported that 49% of students attended at least one year of early childhood education, and 30% of students
did not attend early childhood education. Twenty-one percent did not respond to this question. The private sector tends to have more participation than the public sector of children attending early childhood education for at least one year (76% private; 41% public). In terms of performance, the study revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of students who attended early childhood education for at least one year and students who did not participate in early childhood education. This result prevails even controlling by funding source (public or private).

**ECEC in the Dominican Republic**

At the local level, studies about ECEC are minimal. In the D.R., Educational Law 66-1997 requires only the last level (pre-first) of Early Childhood Education (ECE) as mandatory in the public school system. However, the government has been increasing its efforts to modernize and consolidate this system. As an example, in 2002, it developed the Proyecto de Fortalecimiento de la Educacion Inicial (PROFEI), funded by the World Bank, whose primary objective was to build up the quality of a more unified model that could integrate both Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system and expand access to five-year-old children. Also, the project emphasized serving children living below the poverty line. Under this project, the first study of supply and demand was conducted on the ECEC public system in 2002.

In 2006, the Centro para Estudios Sociales y Demograficos (CESDEM) and the Pontificia Universidad Catolica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) conducted a second study of supply and demand of the ECEC system in two stages. The first stage was based on the available statistical information to characterize the population and identify school districts and regional offices that would be tapped. For the second phase, surveys and interviews were conducted to evaluate the
outcomes of the intervention (Madera, 2006). National statistics revealed that the net education coverage rate for early childhood education (three- to five-year-old children) was 50.2% in 2018 (IDEC, 2019).

Aristy-Escuder (2016) found in a quantitative study, via linear and logistic regression, that the average age of school entry for a student from low-income families is 4.02 years, while the average of those from high-income families is 2.46 years. Also, parents’ educational attainment is related to school entry. According to Aristy-Escuder, if both parents have a university degree, the age of school is reduced by almost 1.3 years. Also, results from the logistic regression indicate that a student who starts their education a year later is 2.36 times more likely to drop out of school than the child who started one year earlier. The author also points out that the percentage of school dropouts among those who began their education before four years was 4.85%.

Also, Dominguez (2019) found that a three-to-five-years-old child in an urban area is two times more likely to attend an ECEC program than a child in a rural area in the D.R. Also, the same study specified that overall enrollment in early education had experienced significant growth from 1996 to 2012; it went from 29.6 % to 41.2 %. Likewise, from 2011 to 2012, the net rate of early childhood education coverage was 39.4 %. About four out of ten students enrolled in the ECEC were at an appropriate age, which is five-years-old according to the national curriculum (Domínguez, 2019). According to the national framework, the Law 66-97, article 33, establishes early childhood education as the first level of the educational system in the country (five-year-old child).

Regarding early childhood education, the D.R. educational public system focused their academic offering on the last year of the initial level (pre-primary grade), which is for children
five years of age. From the perspective of public policy, it has always been a goal to increase school attendance and reduce dropping out once the child is in the system. However, studies have shown that school enrollment, especially for children under six years of age, depends on several socioeconomic and demographic factors, such as living conditions of the families and even the environment (Dominguez, 2019). A recent study in the country points out that 18.2% are not enrolled in pre-primary (UNICEF, 2017). The study also revealed that 16% of the six-year-old students who attended the first grade of the primary level in the year 2014-2015 school year did not participate in pre-school the previous year.

**Dominican Government Approach to ECEC**

In 2013, the Dominican government began the implementation of the national plan aimed to fulfill the needs of children zero-five years old in a holistic manner. Quisqueya Empieza Contigo (QEC) was conceived as one of the primary actions in the framework of the strategy to fight extreme poverty. The overall objective of QEC is to establish a system of protection and comprehensive care in early childhood, thus seeking to arrange, coordinate, integrate, and regulate the supply of existing services in the country. Moreover, the purpose is to expand the range of coverage and quality through a set of comprehensive care strategies aimed at children from zero-five years of age, their families, and communities (DIGEPEP, 2013). Likewise, it is part of a national plan for comprehensive care in early childhood, whose goal is to incorporate at least 50% of children aged zero-four years in this system and also to ensure that 90% of five-year-olds are included in pre-primary education (Ministerio de Economía Planificación y Desarrollo [MEPyD], 2013).

This plan attempts to increase coverage of early childhood services through two programs: CAFI and CAIPI managed by INAIPI, as stated before. CAFI is a family-based
intervention seeking to strengthen parenting skills by applying strategies that allow children adequate development. CAFI serves 368 children through home visits, while CAIPI centers offer services to children from 45 days old to five years old. This is a center-based intervention aiming to provide education and full attention to children. Each CAIPI is designed to serve 226 children and has 40 employees. CAIPI is purposefully located in the prioritized regions to be the center of a service network that also includes up to five CAFI (INAIP, 2016).

According to INAIPI’s annual report for 2018, the institution had served more than 185,633 under five-year-old children from more than 148,000 families. Also, the institution manages 409 CAFI and 111 CAIPI (INAIP, 2019). These 111 CAIPI centers are composed of 61 CAIPI and 50 CIANI (Centros Infantiles de Atención Integral). CIANI centers are dedicated to serving children from zero- to five-years-old in a holistic manner, as CAIPI does. Also, these centers used to be managed by another institution called CONANI (Consejo Nacional para la Niñez y la Adolescencia), which is to be the governing body of the National System for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANI, 2018). In 2015, CIANI centers were transferred to INAIPI as CAIPI in a transition better known as CAIPI T. The present research focuses on CAIPI because the new model of CAIPI has been established following the new early childhood education new umbrella embedded on the program QEC. Also, CAIPI T are institutions established 20 years ago, which will fall under the QEC framework in the upcoming years.

As can be seen, the D.R. ECEC System is fragmented. Many of the ECEC services are offered independently and funded by different institutions. Also, participation in ECEC programs is not common in the country. Fortunately, the system has been changing to a more unified approach that should boost its improvement.
The Role of Theory in My Study

The present study uses both the Ecological Theory and the Social Justice Theory as lenses for analysis. Bronfenbrenner proposed that to understand a child completely; it is essential to study the active relationship between three main aspects: (a) the child, (b) his/her parents, and (c) their family features (Lin & Bates, 2010). Several studies have emphasized that ecological reasons influence a parent’s decision regarding ECEC. Causes that contribute to the enrollment gap in ECEC include poverty and parental occupation (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2011) and incomplete or incorrect information about the programs (Vesely, 2013). Ecological perspectives could help in the understanding of social policy matters that affects aspects of preschool, such as teacher’s profession and class group size (Williams, Sheridan, & Sandberg, 2014). The authors also explain that social policy issues tend to function in the microsystem. Studying social policy with the ecological theory lens could contribute to our understanding of the general goal of ECEC programs.

The Ecological System Theory Explained

The Ecological Theory has four layers: (a) Macrosystem, the global environment; (b) Exosystemic, the community; (c) Mesosystem, families and schools; and (d) Microsystem, child’s biology and emotions (Ryan, 2001). Regarding the Microsystem, Tudge, Merçon-Vargas, Liang, and Payir (2017) explain that a child’s development is influenced by various Microsystems such as home environment and classrooms. The authors also expand on the importance of the Microsystem since they represented the child’s immediate environment. Then, the Mesosystem is recognized as the correlation between multiple Microsystems. Exosystems are not related directly to the child, but their influence is significant to a child’s development. Finally, Macrosystem, as with Exosystem, is not directly related to the child. However, it does
influence how parents interacted and made a decision about their children. Therefore, although the present study covers all the contexts mentioned above, it focused on the Macro, Exo, and Mesosystems. Regarding the Microsystem, I concentrate on the child’s immediate environment, specifically the family.

Another aspect to consider is the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model, which is embedded in the Ecological Model of Bronfenbrenner’s Theory. The PPCT starts with the proximal process, which is recognized as ‘‘the engine of development’’ (Tudge et al., 2017). Bronfenbrenner (1994) described the proximal process as the continuous interactions that take place in the person’s immediate environment. Then, personal characteristics are formed by three main elements: (a) personal stimulus, primary impressions, (b) resource characteristics, experiences, and (c) force characteristic, drive. Context, on the other hand, refers to the environment. Bronfenbrenner’s Theory has four contexts, known as the system of the theory mentioned earlier. Finally, time to consider the fact that other aspects are not inert, they naturally tend to change (Tudge et al., 2017). I use the ‘‘proximal process’’ idea to examine each child’s most proximal environment: family.

Studies using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory tend to explore the diverse perspectives of a child’s development. For instance, Williams, Sheridan, and Sandberg (2014), in their qualitative analysis of 30 Swedish teachers about their interpretations of children’s learning about that country’s curriculum goals, found via interviews that teachers who value social pedagogic orientations in preschool appear to avoid academic content. They tend to appreciate a play that fosters social competence. On the other hand, teachers who place more value on academic content focused more on teaching content in mathematics and science. Williams et al.
(2014) explained how the ecological viewpoint supports the understanding of social policy concerns in early childhood education, such as operational issues like staff/child ratios.

**The Social Justice Theory**

Every child deserves to develop adequately. To do so, their basic needs must be covered. Also, access to services that would contribute to their development, such as safety, health, and education, has to be guaranteed. Scholars have explained how this could be accomplished. For instance, John Rawl’s (1999/1971) Theory of Justice, which is based on fair society, explained that “each person in their original position should care about the well-being of some of these in the next generation” (p. 128). Other scholars have also explained that social arrangement should generate favorable conditions for childhood (Bojer, 2000).

Favorable conditions for childhood are often not available or even considered by families as the primary decision-makers for children. This could be due to diverse reasons, including the absence of services designed to provide these favorable conditions and families’ inability to recognized such favorable conditions for their children. Considering this, societies should protect children in that situation by providing these services and guaranteeing that children are not put at risk. At the center of social justice are the ideas that society should be fair, just, and equitable (Freire, 1970; Rawl,1999/1971). Social justice is also defined as using education as a tool for human development. For instance, Martha Nussabun (2007) explained that education is pivotal for democracy since it is through education that values and ideas that help structure society are taught.

Countries have developed strategies to assure that this preparation for a distance future begins in early stages by establishing compulsory education. Also, ECEC programs in many countries have been inspired by social justice. For example, Hard, Press, and Gibson (2013)
explained that ECEC programs in Australia are based on reform movements motivated by social justice ideas. Also, the design of Australian ECEC programs has been informed by research that highlights the potential of these programs contributing to close the gap regarding educational disadvantage.

**The Use of Theory in the Present Study**

Many types of research used the Ecological System Theory as their lenses to interpret complicated issues involving social justice elements, such as equality and inclusion. For example, some studies used this theoretical framework to show that parents have fragmented beliefs regarding inclusive classrooms. One such study is Sira, Maine, and McNeil’s (2018) research investigating the perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of seven parents of typically developing three-year-old and four-year-old children participating in southeastern university’s inclusive child development centers. Using the Ecological System Theory, the researchers found via interviews that parental viewpoints, opinions, and experiences differ. Typically, parents seem to be in favor of inclusion regarding corporal limitations, but they do not seem to be in favor of inclusion when referring to behavioral conditions.

Another aspect to consider is cultural practice. Shute and Slee (2015) explained that since cultural practices are often based on non-rational considerations, elements such as culture have to be taken into account besides the ecological context in which the person develops. Therefore, the present study also considers the social aspects of ECEC related to the welfare features of childcare, such as the higher emphasis on health and lower stress on the educational aspect. Scholars have also warned that ECEC policies that follow neoliberal economic policies tend to increase the gap between rich and poor since these policies tend to focused on standardization (Cox, 2010). Many authors have pointed out this issue from an ECEC perspective, highlighting
that under neoliberal policies, children’s interests are often undervalued (Brogaard, 2015; Brown, 2015). Many Latin American countries have non-formal and community-based childcare interventions (Young & Fujimoto-Gomez, 2004). This type of intervention puts the most attention on the ways a civil society might take part in early childhood development, which goes beyond the educational scope and into social justice (Kirpal, 2002).

As a result, the present study considers the social aspect by using the interpretative lens of Social Justice Theory. Haslip and Gullo (2018), in their analysis about the changing landscape of early childhood education, comment that holistic education involves a persistent commitment to the principle of social justice to develop a more just society. Also, international organizations such as OECD (2006) have highlighted that the concept of democracy has to be covered in pre-school for democracy to grow into an item of learning while enlightens the learning process itself. Inequality among ECEC services is present in LAC. Studies highlighted the key challenges about social justice that some LAC still has in terms of ECEC interventions. For instance, while coverage is almost universal for four-to-six-years-olds (pre-primary education), services for children under three years old is still a challenge (Pardo & Adlerstein, 2016).

**Chapter 2 Closure**

The literature presented above emphasized the importance of ECEC experiences for any child despite their background. However, many aspects have to be taken into account for ECEC interventions to have a positive impact on child development. Some of these aspects are related to access, funding, and families’ understanding of these programs and their importance to their child’s adequate development. According to the literature, families’ perspectives about ECEC programs are crucial to understanding how children under five years old are enrolled and achieve regular attendance at this type of program.
Other studies conducted emphasized that ECEC programs are often related to political issues. Wei and Jing’s (2014) literature review of 466 studies on early childhood education in China and found, via content analysis method, that current studies in the early childhood education system are mostly affected by macro politics. The researchers discuss the importance of this topic nowadays and the attention it receives from the government. The authors emphasized the significance of research on this subject for the proper development of policy regarding this issue. Also, the researchers pointed out that in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the social environment, studies should include qualitative research methods. With this in mind, I conducted the present study under a qualitative perspective that would attempt to understand families’ views regarding ECEC in the D.R.

My study is built upon the evidence presented above to add to the literature about ECEC in the Dominican Republic, where studies about this topic are rare. My study attempts to understand how Dominican low-income families of children under five years old enrolled in CAIPI make decisions about enrollment and attendance. In Chapter 3, I explain how this study was carried out.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study used a basic interpretive qualitative research approach, collecting data directly from the mother, father and/or guardians of children who attend an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) intervention in the Dominican Republic (D.R.) called Comprehensive Care Centers focused on Early Childhood (CAIPI, acronym in Spanish). Basic interpretive qualitative research is used to reveal participants’ understandings of their situation (Creswell, 2009) and to find out the essence of the issue being studied (Kessack, 2015). Considering that meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998), the basic interpretive qualitative research approach helped me to interpret how low-income families make decisions about early childhood education and care for their children from birth to five years of age. Merriam and associates (2002) explain that basic interpretative studies are often interested in three main aspects: (a) how people understand their experiences, (b) how they build their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. With this in mind, this type of approach is suitable for my study, since I planned to understand these families’ experiences with CAIPI program in the Dominican Republic (D.R.).

Results from the Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in March 2018 that also had the purpose of understanding how mothers, fathers, and guardians of students enrolled in an ECEC in the D.R. make decisions regarding their child’s enrollment and attendance at the CAIPI ECEC intervention program. Data was collected by engaging in semi-structured open-ended dialogue (Janmohamed, 2014). Four interviews were analyzed using an interview protocol to establish a profile of parents’ and
guardians’ employment status, childcare and education arrangements for their toddlers, previous childcare arrangements for siblings, and other relevant family background factors. The main focus of the interviews was to explore their knowledge of and beliefs about the ECEC program, and other issues that influence how parents view the importance of regular attendance for their pre-school children. Finally, the interviews focused on factors that could affect the parents’ ability to achieve consistently high attendance for their children. The interview lasted 30 minutes on average and provided important clues for how to develop the design for data collection and analysis for the present dissertation study.

The data analysis steps were as follows: (a) transcriptions of interviews; (b) check for precision; (c) combination of attribute, descriptive and in-vivo coding; (d) pattern coding; and (e) development of tables to categorize, re-cluster, and theme development (Peck, Maude & Brotherson, 2015). After conducting my data analysis with the interviews from the small pilot study sample, I found a couple of prominent ideas that may be influencing the parents’ decisions regarding regular attendance for their children:

1. Families believe that the intervention is positive because they feel their children are protected (safety, food, health, and education) in the CAIPI center they attend.

2. Parents’ and guardians’ decisions and actions regarding regular attendance at the CAIPI program are influenced by a variety of factors including (a) other priorities for their time and attention (e.g. work, study, other activities), (b) certain beliefs, (c) specific health, safety, financial, transportation, and other resource-related issues, and (d) their perceptions about what their children actually experience in the CAIPI Center program and why.
I was not surprised at the examples my pilot study participants shared regarding influencing factors a, b, and c. However, I did find one instance of their perceptions about what their children experience at the Center, particularly surprising. I was astounded at the parents’ beliefs about playing, which was their way of characterizing much of what happens at the Center. I analyzed the issue a little, and it now makes sense. In the Dominican culture, mainly in vulnerable communities, parents do not have much time to play with their children. Also, it is probable that these parents and guardians did not have much time to play when they were children. Also, low-income families are not exposed to enriched classrooms with activities that vary from the traditional, so they do not necessarily understand how ‘‘play’’ can also be a means for engaging children in learning. This misconception about play revealed in my pilot study is a reminder to pay close attention to how parents’ and guardians’ assumptions and belief systems may be a significant influence on their child’s attendance patterns at the CAIPI Center as other external circumstances, such as those categorized in my summary of findings above.

The purpose of conducting the pilot study was to use the findings to help refine and study design the focus of my dissertation study. I was able to obtain data from the four pilot participants that have implications for both; thus, the rest of this chapter reflects my incorporation of those implications into my dissertation study design. The main takeaways from the pilot study influencing the full study design are summarized as follows:

1. A social justice lens was necessary for interpreting poverty-related issues.
2. I carefully analyzed parents’ and guardians’ assumptions and beliefs (for example, opinions about the play) and explored where those assumptions and ideas came from (e.g., their childhood and early development). The ecological theory served as a good lens for examining these issues.
3. I added document analysis to my study designs, so I could utilize data from CAIPI Center records and documents to inform my recruitment and data collection process for the full study.

4. I used some of the factors I identified in the pilot interviews (e.g., health issues, housing conditions, etc.) as the basis for probing into the circumstances that influenced the participants I recruited for the full study.

5. I developed the design for the full study based on a basic interpretive qualitative approach, as described in Miller’s (2013) dissertation. Also, I used as a guide Merriam and associates (2002), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Richards (2010), and Thorne (2016).

6. I reviewed my research sub-questions to be sure that they were aligned, coherent, and not redundant.

**Reflections on My Identity (Reflexivity)**

This research project is an attempt to examine the factors that influence the decision of low-income parents and guardians regarding the enrollment and attendance of their children in the national ECEC intervention program in the Dominican Republic, called CAIPI. I adopted a social justice lens to serve my research purpose because I have a personal commitment to research that contributes to the understanding of underserved populations and the empowerment of those populations. Specifically, I wanted to be an agent for giving a voice to underserved families in poverty in the Dominican Republic and use my professional position to bring those voices to bear on the shaping of public policy.

My role as manager of a planning department in the Dominican Institute for Evaluation and Research of Educational Quality (IDEICE, acronym in Spanish) provided me with access to
policymakers through the studies and evaluation reports. With this study, I aimed to contribute to
the understanding of the social structure of the families that the CAIPI programs are designed to
serve. Besides my academic intentions in conducting this study, I wanted to understand the
perceptions of these families regarding the CAIPI program and their beliefs about the education
and care of younger children. As the administrative coordinator of some recent educational
research projects being developed in the Dominican Republic during the last four years, I was
curious about this program’s development, quality, and low attendance rates.

To reduce potential bias, I made use of both reflective and analytic memos to explore
various aspects of my dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions and managed them appropriately, as
I carried out various aspects of the research process. I also sought out opportunities for peer
debriefing (Peck, Maude, & Brotherson, 2015) with colleagues who hold neutral opinions about
this subject or have a particular expertise related to the purpose of my study.

My goal was to maintain reflexivity throughout the design and implementation of this
study so that I would be continuously aware of how my particular experience and background
either limited my understanding or unduly influenced it. As a Dominican citizen who did not
grow up in poverty and who has had the benefit of multiple educational opportunities leading to
a professional position of influence, I am aware of my need to continuously work on my
authenticity and reliability as a researcher on this topic. As such, I followed many practices of
reflexivity that assisted me in maintaining credibility in my design and my analysis of the data
and interpretation of findings.
Population, Sample and/or Setting

Population

The population from which I recruited participants for this study was a pool of mothers, fathers, and/or guardians with at least one pre-school child currently enrolled in the CAIPI program in Santo Domingo Province and the Santo Domingo National District. I recruited potential participants for this study based on the following criteria:

1. Inclusionary criteria: Mothers, fathers, and guardians of children who are currently enrolled in a CAIPI program serving either the Santo Domingo Province or Santo Domingo National District and have attended at least one enrollment period between January 2015 to December 2018. I recruited participants from the nine CAIPI centers in the two regions. I limited participation to parents or guardians of children enrolled in one of these two regions in order to draw from the most populated areas of the D.R. with the highest concentrations of poverty. I limited participants to those with children enrolled for at least one term to be sure that there is an established attendance pattern for the enrolled child.

2. Exclusionary criteria: Mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in another public or private funded ECEC program. I excluded potential participants who are participating in more than one ECEC program to avoid confusion regarding which program the participant is referencing in their comments.

This study was conducted in the nine CAIPI centers located on Santo Domingo Province and Santo Domingo, National District, in order to reduce the potential for differences in the CAIPI centers to interfere with understanding patterns of participants’ responses that are independent of differences in center characteristics. By drawing participants from these centers
in each of the two highest poverty regions, I was able to increase the potential for transferability of my study findings.

Sample

The recruitment goal for the present study was 16-20 participants whose children have either attended regularly or had high rates of absenteeism at their CAIPI. For this study, more than 14 days in one intervention year was labeled as chronic absenteeism, and good attendance was operationalized as missing ten days or fewer in one intervention year (Ready, 2010; Gottfried, 2014, Sommer et al., 2017). Also, children enrolled for fewer than 20 days were excluded from the analysis since they would have too much absenteeism (Ehrlich et al., 2018). Participants were placed in two categories, one category for mothers, fathers, and guardians of children who missed fewer than ten days of the CAIPI intervention year and the second category for mothers, fathers, and guardians of students who missed more than 14 days in one intervention year. The goal for the study as a whole was to understand how mothers, fathers, and guardians make decisions about and manage their children’s attendance and how the factors compare or contrast for families with either good attendance or chronic absenteeism. To identify the population for recruitment, I used the enrollment and attendance records of the CAIPI Centers of Santo Domingo Province and Santo Domingo, National District and pulled names of parents or guardians of children enrolled for at least one year, who fall into one of the two attendance categories described for the sample.

Access and Recruitment

To recruit participants, I wrote a letter to the Institute of Comprehensive Care for Early Childhood (INAIP, acronym in Spanish) explaining the study and the criteria for participating. This letter had a threefold purpose. First, it asked for access to each center’s database (Santo
Domingo Province and Santo Domingo, National District). The databases contain information about both enrollee attendance rates and family characteristics, such as parent or guardians’ info (name, address, and phone number) and household poverty index. Second, the letter requested the collaboration of the center’s coordinator in this project. The center coordinator and staff helped in the recruitment of the participants by reviewing the database provided for me to use as a sampling frame according to the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria to identify a pool of potential participants. (See Appendix A.)

The third purpose of the letter was to ask the center coordinator and staff to sign a confidentiality agreement. This agreement elicited the commitment of center coordinators and staff to hold the identity of persons recruited for and participating in my study in the strictest confidence. Also, considering that some participants were not able to read or sign the consent, I suggested that someone from the center would be with us while I read the consent form to the participants. This would ensure that a second person witnessed the informed consent process and a participant in concluding that the potential participant achieves informed consent. No staff member was allowed to participate in the interview; however, to protect the full confidentiality of the content of the interview conversations.

I continued to potential participants until I secured participant consent from at least seven mothers, fathers, or guardians in either the low attendance category or high or regular attendance category, with no fewer than 16 consented participant’s total. If I needed to recruit more participants in order to achieve saturation with each of the two groups of participants, I would recruit up to two more participants for each category for a maximum number of 20 participants.
Recruitment and Informed Consent Procedures

When potential participants expressed interest in participating in the study, I met with them to review the informed consent (Appendix B) and make sure they have a chance to ask additional questions. The meeting was held at the CAIPI Center, where the child is enrolled. I worked with a staff member with whom the potential participant is comfortable to assist in the consent process if needed to ensure that the consent was informed and voluntary. If the potential participant agreed to participate in the study, he/she signed indeed the consent agreement (witnessed by the CAIPI staff person if necessary), and I scheduled the interview in a private room at the CAIPI Center at a convenient time for the participant.

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

For this study, I used an in-depth interview protocol designed to establish rapport and a comfortable conversation with each study participant (See Appendix C for the interview protocol and Appendix D for a table that shows the alignment between interview questions and research questions). I field-tested the interview protocol in the pre-dissertation pilot study described above and used the field test experience to refine it for this study. I also conducted a document analysis of the children’s attendance records in order to place participants into one of the two study categories—good or regular attendance and chronic absenteeism (Ready, 2010; Gottfried, 2014, Sommer et al., 2017). It was important to conduct the interview in a manner that was comfortable and made the study participants feel safe and respected. For this reason, I used the interview protocol as a guide for my conversation with the participants but remained flexible in how I phrased my questions and comments and how I ordered the interview questions in order to adapt to each participant and maintain a natural conversation with that participant.
**Data Collection Protocols and Procedures**

I interviewed parents for this study utilizing in-depth conversations focused on capturing a full and rich portrayal of the parents’ values, beliefs, experiences, dispositions, context, capacity, resources, and structures that influence the attendance of their children in this ECEC program (Peck et al., 2015). Although the interviews were semi-structured in format, I used a flexible approach to interviewing as described above in order to keep the dialogue open-ended (Janmohamed, 2014). I avoided framing or phrasing any question in a manner that could make a participant feel uncomfortable or threatened. If any of my questions appeared to make a participant uncomfortable, I did not press for a response; instead, I sought a more comfortable way for the participant to respond and accepted that response respectfully. Since I was assuming the responsibility, as a researcher, for giving the study participants a chance for their voice and perspective to be heard authentically, I refrained from paraphrasing or asking leading questions. Instead, I took my lead from what participants told me and encouraged them to elaborate or expand on the points they offered in response to my interview guide.

I asked each participant to meet with me at the CAIPI Center, where their child is enrolled and conducted the interviews in a quiet and private room provided by the CAIPI staff. I asked each participant to complete at least one initial interview that lasted 60 minutes maximum. I audio-recorded and transcribed each interview (Peck et al., 2015) with the consent of the participants. At the end of each interview, participants completed a demographic form (or I completed the form for them based on their verbal answers), and I provided a token appreciation gift (either a mug or tote bag) to the participant (Brown et al., 2013).
Data Analysis

Type of Data Analysis

I transcribed each interview verbatim; however, I assigned pseudonyms or codes to each participant and redacted any personally identifying information about participants from the transcription in order to protect participant confidentiality. Once the interview was transcribed, I analyzed the data inductively (Happo, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2013; Peck et al., 2015). I used a two-cycle approach to the data analysis based on Marshall and Rossman (2011). The first cycle was emergent, extracting salient points from the data and creating meaning-based categories or clusters of in vivo codes to capture the full range and variation of ideas embedded in the codes. The second cycle was inductive, using an interpretive lens based on the most prominent emergent ideas that respond to my research questions to further reduce the meaning categories into thematic units with sub-themes as needed to develop each theme fully. My interpretive lens included both the social justice and ecological theories included in my conceptual framework (see Chapters 1 and 2 for specifics of these theories); findings from similar studies with similar populations from other countries and cultural contexts; and ideas that emerged from my pilot study.

Analysis of Steps

The analysis steps that I carried out included the following: (a) listen to the interviews before transcription; (b) transcribe all interviews; check for precision; (c) read each interview several times (Miller, 2013) before codification by hand; (d) develop memos to capture my initial impressions of each interview transcript; (e) print interviews for initial codification with in vivo codes by hand; (f) transfer the in vivo codes from each transcript to an electronic codebook; (g) begin the clustering and re-clustering process with the in vivo codes using a combination of
attribute, and descriptive codes for categorization; (h) continue to further reduce the coding categories with pattern coding; (i) develop tables to categorize, re-cluster and develop tentative themes and sub-themes (Peck et al., 2015); (j) test and refine themes and sub-themes as needed to capture the essence of the interview data; and (k) represent data using vignettes to show how the themes and sub-themes apply to each study participant (Marcella, 2014).

**Trustworthiness**

In order to address trustworthiness, the present study considered Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

**Credibility**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), the goal of credibility is to prove that inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to guarantee that the subject was adequately identified and described. With this in mind, I used peer debriefing. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, peer debriefing “is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling analytical sessions and to explore aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). I conducted this strategy with several colleagues (Peck et al., 2015) to guarantee objectivity. These potential colleagues were either work colleagues or national experts in the field. I completed my analysis and reviewed my tentative themes and sub-themes as interpreted through my various interpretive lenses in order to determine if the peer reviewers believed I was credibly using my interpretive lenses and offered any alternative interpretations. I refrained from allowing peer reviewers to interact with the raw data or in vivo codes to avoid any breach of confidentiality for my participants.

Another means of establishing credibility was to assure that my review of the literature was thorough, and my application of the theory was accurate. I invited critical review from my
committee chair, committee members, and peer reviewers to ensure the appropriate use of
previous research and establish theory in both the support for my study purpose and focus, as
well as interpretation of my findings.

**Dependability**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), dependability means that the results are
‘‘consistent and dependable’’ (p. 251). The authors emphasized the importance of results being
reliable with the data gathered. In order to address issues of dependability, I conducted external
audits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by having a colleague with data analysis experience and expertise
review my analysis process and product of my study (i.e., my analysis codebook). I chose
someone with experience in qualitative research and knowledgeable about the steps qualitative
researchers follow in reducing their data to themes and sub-themes.

**Transferability**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) refer to transferability as the extent to which ‘‘findings
will be useful in a similar situation’’ (p. 261). To address transferability, I conducted a full
description by providing rich details of the situation and subjects studied, as Lincoln and Guba
(1985) explained. I also collected data from local ECEC’s experts in the Dominican Republic to
profile the population served by the ECEC programs and compare that profile to the profile of
my study participants.

**Confirmability**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) advise qualitative researchers to “be prepared to argue that
the logic and interpretative nature of qualitative research can be made transparent to others” (p.
262). In order to address confirmability, I produced a detailed and complete audit trail for each
step of my data collection and analysis process. The term, audit trail refers to the process of
detailing the material and techniques used in every stage of the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Also, I wrote a series of analytic memos to document and reflect on my thinking as I conduct each step in the data collection and analysis process. I also used my analytic memos to manage researcher biases, the coding process, and the decisions I made during the data analysis process (Saldaña, 2013). I followed Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) advice by writing memos about my reflections.

**Limitation and Delimitations**

This study was conducted in two provinces with high levels of poverty in the urban area of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. As a result, there are a few limitations to this study. First, although semi-structured interviews were suitable for this study, more detailed data on these families could have shed more light on their background and circumstances. This data was not available; however, in order to obtain a broader understanding, this study could have connected with the agencies in the community that link families with the intervention. However, these agencies function in a different system, and it is hard to approach them.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to understand how mothers, fathers, and guardians of students enrolled in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs make decisions regarding their children’s enrollment and attendance in the governmental intervention called Comprehensive Care Centers focused on Early Childhood (CAIPI, acronym in Spanish). The study used a basic interpretive qualitative research approach, collecting data directly from the mothers’, fathers’, and/or guardians’ of children enrolled in the intervention for at least one term of the intervention year.

Participants were recruited from five out of the nine CAIPI centers in the two regions, Santo Domingo, the province, and Santo Domingo, National District. Even though I visited the nine centers, explained my study, and asked for the staff collaboration, not all center coordinators were willing to help me. The recruitment process was as follows:

(a) I contacted all nine CAIPI centers and set up a time to meet with CAIPI center administrator and staff to explain my study (purpose, participant’s classifications, etc.), to ask their help to recruit participants according to the criteria and to ask them to sign the confidential agreement.

(b) The five centers that agreed to participate called me a few weeks later and told me that they have some parents that will participate in my study; usually, they told me the attendance category of the parent (low or regular attendance).
(c) Next week I scheduled appointments to meet individually with the parents at the centers to explain the study and answer their questions. During the meeting, most parents opted to do the interview at that moment.

(d) During the interview, I asked for their personal information (name, telephone, name of their children, etc.), and asked the interview questions. I told them that I may need to have another follow-up interview and gave them my flyer again in case they wanted to contact me.

(e) Lastly, I confirmed with the center coordinators and staff the missing days of every participants’ children and confirmed their attendance on my list.

Categorizing the families into the ‘‘Low Attendance’’ or ‘‘High Attendance’’ groups was difficult since the parents’ or guardians’ names are written differently (one last name; family name; given name spelled differently, etc.) on the center documents. Also, each CAIPI center uses a different method for recording attendance. Some of the center coordinators asked the teachers to record the attendance data, and other centers use the institution’s software for recording attendance. For this study, participants were placed into the categories based on the number of absences from August to December 2018. The low attendance category has parents of children that miss more than 11 days in one term. While the regular attendance category has parents of children that miss less than 11 days in one term. I chose the school term from August to December 2018 since it was the most recent school term when I began my studies. For the data analysis, I performed the steps mentioned in Chapter 3. I analyzed interviews from 16 parents, nine were categorized as regular attendance, and seven were categorized as low attendance.
Findings

This section presents the findings organized by research questions. I used Appendix D, alignment of the research question to interview questions presented to the family’s responses to research questions.

Research Question No. 1: How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention describe the importance of the program?

The first research question for this study aimed to shed light on the importance of the CAIPI program for families. In order to do that, the interview protocol has five questions intended to address this subject. According to the data, regular attendance category families tend to think that the program is important because the child is: (a) happy, (b) independent, (c) safe, (d) and learns about “good and bad”; civic knowledge (flag, national anthem, founding fathers), and sharing. They also said that the program provides education and teaches manners. Similarly, adults can work and do not have to worry about their children. The following vignette shows a representative answer of one participant labeled as regular attendance to interview question: “How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention describe the importance of the program?”

Spanish  
Bastante. Es importante porque hasta el momento no tengo que preocuparme de nada, la comida, aquí come, le dan su comida, lo atienden bien, ellos se entretienen mucho e interactúan mucho con niños y no tienen la mente en cosas vacías de fuera.

English  
Pretty much. It is important because so far I do not have to worry about anything, the food, here they [child] eat, they [center] give them their food, they [center] take good care of my child, the child entertain themselves a lot and interact a lot with children, and they [child] does not have in his/her mind empty things from the outside.
On the other hand, low attendance category families tend to think that the program is important because the child: (a) socializes with other children of their ages, (b) learns (coloring, sing songs, manners), (c) brushes their teeth, (d) plays with didactic toys, (e) has a good influence. Also, they said that when their children go to school, they will be stronger academically. The following vignette shows a representative answer of one participant labeled as low attendance to interview question: “How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention describe the importance of the program?”:

Spanish  
Sí, Porque la estimulación temprana le ayuda a detectar cualquier problema que tiene el niño, cualquier problema, cualquier conducta.

English  
Yes, because the early stimulation helps to detect any problem your child has, any problems, any behavior.

Another interview question related to the first research question aims to understand parents’ knowledge about CAIPI program. The following vignette is a representative answer by one of the participants in the regular attendance group to the interview question: “How do you think your child occupies their time in the CAIPI?”

Spanish  
Yo tengo entendido que luego de ese círculo, ellos se sientan en la mesa a esperar creo que el desayuno, luego de eso ellos entran a su rutina, tengo entendido que hay un día de cuentos, al otro día como de figuras geométricas, hay otro día de actividades espaciales…

English  
I understand that after that circle, they [child] sit at the table to wait I think that they eat breakfast, after that they enter their routine, I understand that there is a day of storytelling, the next day like geometric figures, there is another day dedicated to space activities…

Similarly, the following vignette is a representative answer by a participant in the low attendance group to the same interview question:
Well, they [child] have a schedule; they [child] have game time, storytelling, to eat, to sleep, and so on. They [child] are governed by a schedule.

Regarding information on whether parents would recommend CAIPI, the interview protocol includes two questions. In general, most of the participants would recommend CAIPI.

The following vignette is a representative answer by a participant in the regular attendance group to interview questions aiming to address why parents recommend CAIPI.

…as I told you, by how they [center] treat him. Because they [center] treat him well. They teach you. They help you with anything you or your child need too.

Participant in the low attendance group expressed the following:

Because the service is good and the children learn a lot… it is better to have them here [center] than to be in the neighborhood, especially because in the neighborhood that we live, there are many risks …

Research Question No. 2: Which factors influence families’ decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI?

The second research question for this study aimed to describe the factors that influence families’ decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI. With this in mind, the interview protocol has three questions about this matter. On average, these factors influence families’
decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI: (a) number of children, (b) distance, (c) money, (d) CAIPI help to find a school for the child, (e) being a working mother or single mother.

Families categorized on regular attendance usually live less than 10 minutes away of the CAPI and are single parents with more than one child.

The interview protocol asks about how parents decide to enroll their child in the program.

The following vignette is a representative answer from a participant in the regular attendance group:

**Spanish**  

cada vez que venía siempre estaba lleno. Siempre me decían teníamos una población sumamente poblada, ahora no se puede. Un día hasta grité y ni así, nada …. el cuñado mío se puso en eso, venía aquí y más o menos y por eso fue que nos lo inscribieron. Tuve esa suerte.

**English**  

Every time I came, it was always full. They [center] always told me: we are fully occupied, now we cannot. One day I even cried, but that did not work … my brother-in-law got into it, came here, and that is why they enrolled him here. I had luck.

One participant in the low attendance responded below.

**Spanish**  

La gente hablando, estaban viendo la construcción, le dijeron que estaban haciendo un CAIPI. Me anoté, fueron, hicieron el levantamiento, pasaron por mi casa, me escribieron y luego me llamaron para informarme que aceptaron a los 3 aquí y traje los documentos, lo inscribieron y ya están aquí.

**English**  

People talking, they were watching the construction; they said they were doing a CAIPI. I signed up, they [center] passed by my house, they registered me, and then called to inform me that they accepted my three children here and I brought the documents, they enrolled them, and they are already here.’
The following vignette is a representative answer from a participant in the regular attendance group to interview questions: “Why did you enroll your child in the CAIPI program?”

Spanish  
*Buena... es mejor dejar a los niños en lugar como este que tu saben que te lo cuidan, te lo atienden, te lo dan comida, no te lo maltratan... tú sabes. Es algo que te da confianza. Mas por el bueno servicio que tú ves, la buena educación. Ya como esto esto ahora mismo, a veces tú lo deja con alguien y te lo maltrata, no le da lo que tú le dejas... por un sin número de razones, tú me entiendes.*

English  
Well... it is better to leave the children in a place like this one that you know they take care of your child. They give them food, they do not abuse them... You know. It is something that gives you confidence. For good service, a good education. Sometimes you leave your child with someone, and they abuse them, they do not give them what you leave them... for a number of reasons, you understand me.

However, low attendance families usually are not single parents, with more than one child and lives, on average, less than 10 minutes away from the CAPI. The following vignette is from one participant in the low attendance group to the interview question: “Why did you enroll your child in the CAIPI program?”:

Spanish  
*Buena, es una ayuda para uno más ahora que por tenerlos, ahí, tan rápido tuve que parar la universidad, pero ya como están aquí, empecé de nuevo. Ya el viernes, más probable, entro de nuevo.*

English  
Well, it is a help for me because since I had them, I had to stop college, but since they are here, I started over. Already on Friday, most likely, I will go in again.
In addition, the interview protocol attempts to understand what parents hope the CAIPI program will do for their child. One participant in the regular attendance group gave the following response to those questions:

Spanish  
_Yo quisiera que mi niño siga los caminos del estudio y cosas así, ya cuando él salga y que haya más oportunidades como esta de que mi niño pueda seguir estudiando porque esto es como un estudio básico y yo poder tener, seguir teniendo oportunidades para que él sea... ¿cómo te digo?... que él no se me pierda en el camino._

English  
_I want my child to follow the paths of study and things like that, and when he leaves [this center] and there are more opportunities like this one that my child can continue studying because this [center] is like a basic study and I can have, continue to have, opportunities for him to be... how do I tell you? ...that he does not get lost on the road._

A parent in the low attendance category gave the following answer:

Spanish  
_Que siga como va. Aquí le dan mucho amor, lo cuidan muy bien._

English  
_That my child keeps it going. They [center] give him/her [child] a lot of love; they [center] take good care of him/her [child]._

**Research Question No. 3: How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention make decisions about attendance?**

The third research question for this study aimed to understand how mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention make decisions about attendance. For this purpose, the interview protocol has at least four questions on this topic. Parents of children in the regular attendance group liked the following features of CAIPI: (a) well-trained staff, (b) centers’ activities, (c) how well the children are cared for, and (d) what their children learn at the center. On the other hand, parents of children in the same category do not like the following: (a) parents
do not respect center hours, (b) food is scarce, and (c) the center often closes at noon, only notifying the parent the day before.

On the other hand, parents of a child labeled as low attendance tends to like CAIPI because of: (a) what the child learns at the center, (b) responsible staff, and (c) activities at the center. Parents of children in the same category do not like the following: (a) inappropriate behavior children learn from other children; (b) the center does not notify parents when they will work for only half-day, and (c) closing hours.

The following vignette is an answer to the interview questions: “Does he or she miss many sessions? If so, what are some of the reasons your child misses or does not attend sessions?”

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regular</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>No, prácticamente no faltan porque cuando yo no las puedo traer, las trae el esposo mío si está aquí. Yo trato de que ellas no falten. No hay motivos ni razón porque faltar porque eso es un servicio, es como te digo, cuando mis hijas están aquí yo sé que están seguras. Si no puedo traerlas por algún motivo, yo se lo mando a decir la razón o el motivo...</td>
<td>Bueno, el duró, como te dije, duró como I mes sin venir y me decían: Tienes que traerlo, sino usted me dice...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>No, practically they [child] do not miss because, when I cannot take them, my husband takes them if he is here. I try not to miss class. There is no reason to miss class because this is a service. It is as I say when my children are here, I know they are safe. If I cannot take them for any reason, I will tell them [center] the reason ...</td>
<td>Well, the child lasted, as I told you, the child lasted about one month without coming here [center], and they [center] told me: “You have to take the child here, if not, you tell me …”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Another vital element is that most parents report that their children like the intervention. However, more families of children labeled as low attendance tend to be sick more often than the ones categorized as regular attendance.

**Research Question No. 4: What are the circumstances that contribute to or detract from the children’s attendance rate?**

The last research question for this study focused on the circumstances that contribute to or detract from the children’s attendance rate. To answer this question, I analyzed both elements from the interviews, and the data provide by INAIPI. In general, circumstances that influence children’s attendance rates are the following: (a) number of people at home available to take care of the child, (b) child’s health, (c) being a single parent, (d) parents’ work schedule, and (e) the number of children. In this sample, two circumstances contribute to children attending. First, parents of children labeled as regular attendance tend to be single. Second, employment status, as parents of children labeled as regular attendances, tends to have a job. On the other hand, the circumstances that detract children’s participation are children’s health and the number of people at home available to take care of the child.

**Summary of Findings**

The present study aimed to understand families’ barriers to achieving regular attendance at center-based governmental intervention programs in the D.R. known as CAIPI. Findings from this study informed program managers and policy leaders about the central beliefs and expectations that Dominican low-income families have about the CAIPI program. According to this study findings, both low and regular attendance categorized family’s beliefs that CAIPI is important for their children.

Also, factors influencing families’ decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI are usually: (a) number of children, (b) distance of the center, (c) money constraints, (d) CAIPI help
to find a school for the child, and (e) being a working mother or single mother. Regarding families’ decisions about attendance, most of the participants of this study express that the child’s health is the main limitation for the child to attend to CAIPI. Finally, the circumstances that seem to contribute most for children’s attendance to CAIPI are being a single parent and having a job. On the other hand, conditions that often detract from children’s attendance are children’s health and the number of people at home available to take care of the child.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This section presents the analyses and discussion of the findings organized by major themes. Also, some vignettes are shown to highlight the participant's voice. Policy and program recommendations are also discussed.

**Program’s Relevance**

According to the data, both regular and low attendance category families tend to consider that CAIPI intervention is vital for their children. Generally, both family categories of parents think that the program is important because their child learns, and the center takes good care of their child. These results have to be considered under the circumstance that the intervention takes place. Typically, these families are located in low-income communities, where there are not many resources to support optimal child development. On this matter, parents of both categories report the following about the intervention:

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<th>Regular</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish</strong></td>
<td>...aquí la alimentan mejor que en mi casa porque aquí hay una doctora que supervisa los alimentos. Después que ellas están aquí, aquí hay cuidado porque no la van a dejar ir a la calle. Después de que ellas están aquí, yo no tengo ningún tipo de dolor de cabeza...</td>
<td>...te sirve para que tus hijos estén en otro ambiente que no sea el de la casa, que no sea el de los vecinitos, que no sea el de los niños cercanos...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
… Here [center] they [children] feed better than in my own house because here is a doctor who supervises the food. After they [children] are here, they are careful because they [center] will not let the children go to the street. After they [children] are here, I do not have any headache…

…it helps you to keep your children in a room with other children than the ones in the house, other than ones of the old ones, other than that of the children nearby…

Analyzing these vignettes under the Ecological Systems Theory, at least two of its systems are present, ecosystem and mesosystem. The first involves the community in which the child developed; the latter includes schools and families. One of these vignettes exemplifies parents’ perspectives about the environment in which the child grows; specifically, their neighborhood. The parent seems to feel more comfortable sending their child to CAIPI since while there, the child will be continuously monitored. Similarly, the other parent seems to value the fact that the child is going to eat adequately.

As stated before, some of the factors that influenced families’ decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI are the following: (a) number of children, (b) distance, (c) money, (d) CAIPI help to find a school for the child, and (e) being a working mother or single mother. Also, families in both regular and low attendance groups usually live, on average, less than 10 minutes walking distance away from the CAIPI and have more than one child. However, there are some differences between the two groups. First, families labeled in regular attendance groups tend to be working parents, while families in the low attendance group usually are not. Second, families in the regular attendance group tend to have more than one child at CAIPI, while families in the low attendance group do not tend to have more than one child at CAIPI. Third, families in the regular attendance group typically have more than two children in their families,
while families in the low attendance group usually do not. Fourth, families in the regular attendance group usually do not have more than one adult at home, while families in the low attendance group usually have more than one adult at home available that can take care of the child.

In summary, both low and regular attendance groups are similar in their opinions about the CAIPI program. The factors influencing families’ decisions regarding sending their child to CAIPI tend to be related to families’ availability to take care of the child. It seems that if the child lives with a single working parent with other children, his or her odds of attending the center increase since there are no other family members or friends who could take care of him or her.

**Barriers for Attendance**

Both categories make decisions about participation, depending on their child’s health. Many children who live in impoverished communities tend to be sick a lot. Also, as stated earlier, children in the low attendance group tend to be sick more often than the children in the regular attendance group. As stated before, circumstances that contribute to children’s attendance are both being a single parent and having a job while conditions that detract from children’s participation are children’s health and the number of people at home available to take care of the child.

According to results from the present study, it seems that if the child lives with a single working parent with other children, his or her odds of attending the center increase. Also, both low and regular attendance category families report that the child’s health is the primary reason for not sending the child to the center. Other studies had pointed out that family characteristics associated with higher absenteeism frequently include maternal unemployment, while child
characteristics related to absenteeism commonly include poor child health (Yoshikawa et al., 2015).

As mentioned in the literature review, chronic absenteeism in ECE programs have been negatively associated with academic outcomes through second grade (Ehrlich et al., 2018). In the Dominican Republic, children attending ECE programs performed better in third grade (Shecker, 2018) and on the PISA 2015 (Cruz & Morales, 2019) than students who did not participate. However, 30% of third-grade students do not attend ECE programs in the Dominican Republic (Scheker, 2018). This suggests that those children who do not often attend are missing out on more needed academic development that would serve them well in the future.

It is crucial to keep in mind that in the D.R., the public educational system only offers the last grade of ECE known as pre-first (five-year-old children) while the private sector tends to provide education and care services from birth. Also, the country has several public ECEC programs that offer education and care for children from birth to four years old. All of these programs have an educational component, usually starting at the age of three. However, none of them is universally attended, since national data of 2018 revealed that only 33.19% of children from birth to four years old are currently enrolled in ECEC public programs and private schools (IDEC, 2018; ONE, 2018). Also, for 2017, the net participation rate for early childhood education (three to five years old children) was less than 50% (IDEC, 2018).

Many of the ECEC’s sector challenges are embedded in government and state’s public policies. Vargas-Barón (2016) has discussed that problems include a lack of technical leadership for ECEC and weak connections to regional and national ECEC networks. The ECEC sector in the Dominican Republic is not well articulated. Although recent national reforms aim to add coherence to the sector, there is much room for improvement.
Regarding this scope to improve the ECEC sector, at least three central issues should be noted. First, while INAIPI is dedicated to run the two major ECEC public programs in the country, other public programs serve the same population (children under five years old) without efficient coordination. Second, in the public sector, the net participation rate for the grade pre-first (five years old children) is 78% (IDEC, 2018), which means that there are still fewer classrooms available for five-year-old children (pre-schoolers) than available for six-year-old children (first grade of elementary). Third, according to national data for the school year 2016-2017, the school attendance rate is 87.1% for five years old children (IDEC, 2018).

**Child’s Wellbeing as the Main Purpose**

As stated earlier, the present study considers the analysis of both the Ecological Theory and the Social Justice Theory. Regarding the former, this study concentrated on the analysis of the environment (macrosystem), community (exosystem), and families and school (mesosystem). Also, the idea of the “proximal process” is taken into consideration with family as the child’s most proximal environment. The results of this study showed that families are often interested in their child’s development. The following vignettes show examples of families’ ideas about play. Despite their attendance category, parents believe that play is an important element of their children’s life.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Regular</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Sí, porque normalmente lo que yo veo es que los niños en los barrios... aprenden el verbo de los adultos, palabras feas, en su subconsciente le queda ese retraso infantil... porque en vez de jugar con juegos interactivos, no juegan con nada porque hasta los juguetes a las madres le pesa tenerlos en la casa...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... los juegos que tienen [aquí], cuando salen pueden divertirse, pueden sentirse libres...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Play is crucial for children’s wellbeing. Throughout play, children foster their imagination and develop important skills such as conflict management. Many scholars have discussed the importance of play for children (DiCarlo, Baumgartner, Ota, & Geary, 2016; Sounoglou, & Michalopoulou, 2016; Williams, Sheridan & Sandberg, 2014). It is heartening to learn that parents in the present study valued play as part of their children’s life. However, it seems that play is valued as part of child amusement and not as children’s rights (Article 31, Convention on the Rights of the Child UNICEF, 1989) and also as a key element through which children can learn and developed adequately.

Regarding both macrosystem and exosystem, in the local context, play is an essential component of many ECEC interventions and is one of the cornerstones of the curricular design for Early Education. However, parents tend to undervalue the importance of play for their children. According to MICS (ONE & UNICEF, 2015), only 56.8% of Dominican children under five-years-old play with two or more types of toys. Also, parents labeled in the low attendance category pointed out an important issue regarding toys at home. The parent mentioned that bothers some mother to having toys at home. These findings raise important research questions about how children play in this context. Moreover, where do children play in their community and environment? Other studies are needed to explore the role of INAIPI’s family training programs to influences parents’ beliefs about the importance of play for their children.
As with other national ECEC programs, such as in Australia (Hard, Press & Gibson, 2013), the Dominican ECEC system reforms have been inspired by the idea of social justice. However, ECEC programs are relatively new in the D.R. Consequently, from the Social Justice Theory perspective, for most families, this is their first contact with this type of social program. Families participating in the present study are low-income and often related to social programs from a welfare perspective. As a result, parents tend to be grateful for the program and have few critiques about it. The following vignettes are examples from both low and regular attendance category families:

<table>
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<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... yo me siento muy agradecida de la profesora...</td>
<td>... Una persona debe agradecer porque te están ayudando a ser mejor papa...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>... I am very grateful to the teacher...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many aspects have to be considered to analyze these responses. First, these families are not accustomed to this type of program. Second, the country has still not reached the level of universal early childhood education. Third, attendance in the last grade of ECE is still not universal. This suggests that families are still learning to appreciate and understand the importance of ECEC service for the adequate development of their children. Thus, the actual reform of the ECEC system in the D.R. is challenging the existing conditions.

**Research, Program and Policy Recommendations**

This section presents the research, program, and policy recommendation for the D.R. ECEC system. Considering that research regarding ECEC is limited in the local context, several ideas about studies examining the multidimensional aspects of the system are discussed. Also,
some programs and policy recommendations are proposed, given that the holistic ECEC system approach was recently stabilized in the D.R.

In the context of ECEC, there is often a gray area between care and education concepts. Sims, Alexander, Nislin, Pedey, Tausere-Tiko, and Sajaniemi (2018) conducted a thematic analysis of the infant and toddler pedagogy through an online survey in Australia, Buthan, Pacific, The United Kingdom and Finland (data collected in England and Finland not yet published). The authors found that ECEC professionals tend to value both aspects, care, and education in ECEC programs. Analyses like this are needed in the D.R. context since both concepts are usually misunderstood.

The confusion of care and education concepts could be present at many levels of decision-making. At the government level, well-informed policymakers usually know the importance of both care and education concepts for a child’s development. However, this assumption is seldom valid in contexts such as the D.R. in which little is known about ECEC programs and its target populations. At the family level, misunderstanding of the two concepts or the ideas that one is more important than the other for a child’s development could influences families’ decisions about their child’s participation in ECEC programs. Knowing that the ECEC sector has diverse aspects such as approaches, audiences, policy, and decision-makers, an ECEC research agenda that seeks for the ongoing development of the sector should include the issues mentioned above.

The research agenda should be considered the theoretical foundation in which programs like CAIPI are based. Under this perspective, several topics could be explored, such as the actual policies guiding the ECEC sector in the country and the influences of Social Justice Theory in the ECEC national systems. Also, it is vital that this plan also aims to initiate an honest and
inclusive conversation with policymakers and targeted families. Countries with robust ECEC systems usually combined several types of research, such as longitudinal studies, program and project evaluations, international studies, and research-based on administrative data (Kagan & Landsberg, 2019). Subsequently, the research agenda should be robust in its methodological approaches.

Another interesting element to address is the political context in which the ECEC system has been developing. Researchers have described countries’ features of ECEC’s systems and the influence of neoliberal policies in those systems related to the notion of “hybridization” (Sims et al., 2018, p. 2). Scholars have discussed how neoliberal policies have influenced the ECE sector in terms of standardization (Sims et al., 2018) and teaching practices (Brown, 2015). These policies often prioritize children’s potential incorporation in the labor market, focusing on their preparation for academic success later in life. While this approach is an important part of any human life, it is dangerous to consider it as the main aspect of ECE since it diminishes other equally essential aspects of their life. Hybridization, on the other hand, tends to refer to the fusion of social democratic and neoliberalism philosophies (Sims et al., 2018). Further studies are needed to better understand the ECEC system in the D.R.

Similarly, a study that takes advantage of the recently implemented policy about developing diagnostic evaluations in third grade is needed. This study could consider this national evaluation to measure the extent to which children’s performance on this test is related to their attendance in any of the five early childhood interventions currently coordinated by the government. The analyses could be enriched by the association with factors collected in this national operation such as home and school characteristics. This analysis could be the baseline for longitudinal analysis. Another element that could be studied is the transition to school. The
study could analyze how the intervention influences the transition to school (pre-first). Studying this transition would be essential to shed light on how both school and intervention managers are handling children’s transition to both pre-first and elementary school (first grade).

Scholars have pointed out that there is a tendency to evaluate ECEC programs from a systems perspective (Kagan, Gómez, & Roth, 2018). Hence, a study of all early childhood education programs in the D.R. is needed to better understand how the socio-political context in the D.R. affects early childhood programs and policies. These analyses could also explore the cost of the intervention and its dimensions. This study could integrate a historical analysis that digs into the public document available in the country. Also, considering that the D.R. is a developing country that was a Spanish colony, it is crucial to find the perspective described by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) in their book: Why nations fail?: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty. The book discusses that country inequality regarding development and prosperity could be attributed to the type of institutions the country has (Obaid, 2013). It could be interesting to study the institutions that the D.R. has and how are they influenced by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) ideas. In summary, countries with robust ECEC systems often collect data systemically and use this data to both improve the system and inform policy-makers. The D.R. should collect and analyze data to develop a plan to improve its ECEC systems.

In terms of program and policy recommendations, four elements are discussed. First, a community-based approach could be used to address some barriers to achieve regular child attendance to CAIPI. It seems that in order to children attend regularly to a center-based ECEC programs as CAIPI three conditions have to be granted: (a) families are aware of program importance for their child, (b) children have adequate health to attend, and (c) center is near to targeted family household and path to the center is safe. Despite that, families participating in the
present study valued CAIPI. There are differences in which element they seem to appreciate. While some of the families value food, others value that CAIPI helps transfers the child to a preschool once he or she is five years old. However, some of them pointed out that this procedure is, to some extent, chaotic since children are often moving to schools far away, creating logistical problems for families. In this matter, the availability of ECE classrooms might be a constraint.

Another element is child health. Several families pointed out child health as a significant reason for non-attendance. Low-income families usually live in a contaminated environment and also face a lack of water to wash food, maintain a clean home, or even clean themselves properly. These elements are important to a child’s development. When families are primarily focused on meeting their basic needs for clean and safe housing, they have limited time to tend to children’s other developmental needs.

Similarly, the household should be near the center, and the pathway to the center should be safe for families. Some families participating in the present study commented that sometimes the path to the center is unsafe, especially when it is raining. During my visits to the centers, I also learned that the center’s surroundings are unsafe at certain times of the day. Both child health and transition to preschool could be approached from the community as a team. INAIPI has been establishing agreements with local governments (INAIPI, 2019). Considering that local authorities should know communities well, a complete assessment of the unique elements of each community and the shared resources available could be used to design strategies that offer sound responses to these problems.

Second, data and center management should be optimized. Even though many of the centers managed CAIPI’s data efficiently and have a vast knowledge of their population, it seems that there is no consistent procedure to execute routine tasks such as well-organized record
filing. Therefore, staff must be trained about the importance of a well-functioning system to manage data. Also, center management should be improved. Some families participating in the present study highlighted several elements of the center management be improved, such as open hours and food provision. Families presented some complaints regarding CAIPI open hours policy; they explained that several times the staff informed them that the center would be open a half-day just the day before. Regarding food, parents comment that children often complain because the food is not enough for them to feel satisfied. Since lack of standardization hinders the center’s capacity to perform competently, procedures that guide CAIPI’s staff should be considered.

Third, the ECEC system should operate as a system. Given that the Dominican ECEC system is relatively new, at least in its holistic version, this could be the opportunity to establish a comprehensive platform for seeking a well-functioning system. Also, the ECEC system should be able to recruit, retain, and monitor certified, well-trained professionals. In the D.R., professionals working on ECEC programs are exposed to low salaries. ECEC programs require professionals from different areas in order to address children’s needs, especially if these programs are targeted to vulnerable populations. Considering that the D.R. is working on its National Qualifications Framework (Presidencia de la República Dominicana, 2019), ECEC system should advocate for both the recognition of its profession and the demand for the ones the system is needed.

Fourth, the Dominican government should take action to provide universal access to early childhood education. Data from the national report revealed that the net education coverage rate for children from three to five-years-old stood at 50.2% in 2018 (IDEC, 2019). The same report also shows that all ECEC intervention combined barely covered the 36.08% of the population
under five years old. Several national and international research studies demonstrated the positive effects of quality ECEC in many aspects of children’s life. Therefore, strategies supporting the ongoing development of the ECEC sector should be promoted. Considering that ECEC quality programs are expensive, the expansion of early childhood education could be prioritized. Access to free education to children from three to six years old could be developed at public schools. Thus, preschoolers would receive at least three years of early education, alongside with the other services already established at public schools today. From this perspective, programs today targeted to children from birth to five years old could serve children up to three years old.

The D.R. ECEC System is growing. The country is moving to a more comprehensive approach aiming to address the needs of the children from birth to six years old, targeting the most vulnerable population. As a recently established system, several features have to be improved. It is encouraging to see professionals working for the development of this system. Today we have to always place the child at the center of the ECEC system.
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Appendix A

English and Spanish Version
Informational Flyer
We are seeking for mothers, fathers and/or guardians of children under five years old participating in the CAIPI program to volunteer in a study about:

**Parents and guardians perspectives regarding attendance: evidence from a governmental early childhood education and care program**

The purpose of this study is to understand how parents and guardians of enrolled ECEC students make decisions regarding their children’s attendance at the CAIPI program. As a participant in this study, you would be asked to be part of an interview that will last 60 minutes during which; you will be asked a set of questions about your experience being part of this intervention.

**Inclusionary criteria:**

- Mothers, fathers and/or guardians of enrolled children in the CAIPI program for at least one year
- Mothers, fathers, and/or guardians live at a distance of five kilometers or less from an ECEC intervention site (CAIPI).
Departamento de Liderazgo Educativo, Investigación y Tecnología

Estamos buscando madres, padres o tutores de niños menores de cinco años que participen en el programa CAIPI para que sean voluntarios en su estudio sobre:

**Perspectivas de los padres o tutores sobre asistencia: evidencia de un programa gubernamental de atención integral a la primera infancia**

El propósito de este estudio es entender como los padres y tutores de niños inscritos en la intervención de primera infancia toman decisiones sobre la asistencia de su hijo el programa CAIPI. Como participante en este estudio, se te pedirá que participes en una entrevista que durará máximo 60 minutos; en esta entrevista se te harán algunas preguntas sobre tu experiencia siendo parte de esta intervención. Es posible que entrevistas de seguimiento que durarán máximo 60 minutos podrían ser requeridas.

**Criterios de inclusión:**

- Madres, padres y/o tutores de niños y niñas inscritos deben estar en el programa CAIPI por al menos un año.
- Madres, padres y/o tutores de niños y niñas viven en una distancia de dos kilómetros o menos de la intervención de atención integral a la primera infancia conocida como CAIPI.

Para más información por favor contactar a: Rita L. Cruz
Appendix B

Informed Consent
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: [Dr. Regena Nelson]
Student Investigator: [Rita L. Cruz S.]
Title of Study: [Parents and guardians perspectives regarding attendance: evidence from a governmental early childhood education and care program]

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Parents and guardians perspectives regarding attendance: evidence from a governmental early childhood education and care". This project will serve as Rita L. Cruz S.'s research project for the requirements of earning a Ph.D. degree. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
This study will attempt to gain more profound insights regarding how mothers, fathers, and guardians understand, value and make decisions about the attendance of their under five years old children enrolled in a government intervention of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the Dominican Republic (DR) called CAIPI.

Who can participate in this study?
You can participate if you are a mother, father, and guardian of children who have been enrolled in a CAIPI program serving either the Santo Domingo Province or Santo Domingo National District for at least one enrollment period between January 2015 to December 2018. I am limiting participation to parents or guardians of children enrolled in one of these two regions in order to draw from the most populated areas of the DR with the highest concentrations of poverty. I am limiting participants to those with children enrolled for, at least, one term to be sure that there is an established attendance pattern for the enrolled child.

You cannot participate if you are a mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in another public or private funded ECEC program. I am excluding potential participants who are participating in more than one ECEC program to avoid confusion regarding which program the participant is referencing in their comments.

Where will this study take place?
This study will be conducted in Santo Domingo Provinces and Santo Domingo, National District. Interviews will be conducted at a location that is convenient for you and the researcher.
What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to participate in one (or two) 60 minutes interviews.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
As a participant, you will be asked to respond to the question of the interview. Interviews will be scheduled at the time and location convenient to you. You will can chose to not answer any of the questions. In addition, you can choose to stop the interview at any time. During the interview, you will also be asked to complete a demographic form.

What information is being measured during the study?
The researcher will collect information from you regarding your beliefs, experiences, dispositions, context, capacity, resources, and structures that influence your under five year’s old children attendance to the CAIPI program. The researcher will ask you about the factors that contribute or detract your child attendance into this program.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
If you participate in this study you could face two potential risks, one is that you feel obligated to participate. In order to avoid that, the researcher will emphasize that participation in this study is voluntary. Another potential risk is time, in order to minimally affect you as participants; interviews will be scheduled at the time and location convenient for you. Also, each interviews will not last more than 60 minutes.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
There is no benefit for participating in this study except that the results could be shared with you. Results of this study could give a voice for mothers, fathers, and guardians of enrolled children in CAIPI. Also, evidence from this study could help shape how the Dominican government designs early childhood programs and communicates with the target population about this type of intervention.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
The researcher, the advisor of this research project at Western Michigan University and instances for the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic (MINERD) will have access to the data collected. Also, the present study could be published. However, the identity of the participants would be kept in absolute confidentiality.
In addition, the following step will be carried out to:
1. I will code the names of participants
2. All data will be coded and transfer to an electronic device
3. The electronic data will be kept in a password protected and encrypted electronic storage device in a locked cabinet
4. After the study is finished, I will submit all data and materials to the university archive to be kept for three years and destroyed after that.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, [Rita L. Cruz S.] at [1-809-848-5948] or [licelot.cruz@gmail.com]. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

---

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature

Date

Participant’s signature

Date
Appendix C

Interview Protocol
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

For the study of,

“Parents and guardians perspectives regarding attendance: evidence from a governmental early childhood education and care program.”

This interview protocol was adapted from


General Information

Good morning (afternoon). Thank you for coming today. My name is Rita L. Cruz, I am a Ph.D. student at Western Michigan University, and I am from the Dominican Republic. I would like to thank you for agreeing to join in this study about the factors that are influencing mothers, fathers, and guardians’ decisions regarding attendance of their children younger than five years in the governmentally funded program called Comprehensive Care Centers focused on Early Childhood (CAIPI acronyms in Spanish). This is an interview protocol for the following research questions:
1. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children who are enrolled in the CAIPI program describe the importance of the program?

2. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in the CAIPI program make decisions about attendance?

3. What are the circumstances that contribute to or detract children’s attendance rate?

This interview will last a maximum of 60 minutes. I appreciate your time. I would like you to feel comfortable.

**Recording Guidelines**

If you do not have any problem, I like to record our conversation to capture every detail. I guarantee you that this interview will be kept absolutely confidential. Also, all names will be coded to maintain privacy.

**Interview Protocol**

Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today about your decisions and experiences using government provided pre-school programs for your children.

1. Please describe your family and tell me about your children.
   
   a. Do you live far away from here?
   
   b. How do you get here? (walking, public transportation)
   
   c. How many pre-school children do you have – what are their ages?
d. How many children do you have in kindergarten through high school?

e. Which of your children has attended CAIPI? Other pre-school programs?

2. How did you decide to enroll your child or children in a pre-school program?
   a. Why did you enroll your child in the CAIPI program?
   b. What do you hope the CAIPI program will do for your child?
   c. How important do you think the CAIPI program is for your child, and why?

3. How would you describe your experience as a mother working with the CAIPI staff?
   a. What particular things make you feel good about sending your child to this program?
   b. What particular things make you less happy about sending your child to this program?

4. How would you describe your child’s experience attending the CAIPI program?
   a. What does your child say about his or her experiences at the CAIPI program?
   b. How would you describe the value of those experiences for your child?
   c. What do you think is happening in CAIPI?
   d. How do you think your child occupy the time in the CAIPI?

5. How would you describe your child’s attendance at the CAIPI program?
   a. Does he or she miss many sessions? If so, what are some of the reasons your child misses or does not attend sessions?
b. What helps you maintain regular attendance for your child? What gets in the way of regular attendance?

6. Overall, how important do you feel it is for your child to participate in a pre-school program? Why?
   a. If you have younger children, will you send them to the CAIPI program?
   b. Why or why not?

Thank you for taking your time to answer my questions today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your or your child’s experience with the CAIPI program? Your story will be of great value in helping to understand how both parents and children are experiencing the CAIPI program and making decisions about attendance.
Appendix D

Alignment of the Research Question to Interview Questions
Table 1
Alignment of the research question to interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ2. Which factors influence families’ decisions regarding sending their children into CAIPI?</strong></td>
<td>I-1. Please describe your family and tell me about your children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-1a. Do you live far away from here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-1b. How do you get here? (walking, public transportation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-1c. How many pre-school children do you have – what are their ages?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-1d. How many children do you have in Kindergarten through high school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-1e. Which of your children have attended CAIPI? Other pre-school programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ2. Which factors influence families’ decisions regarding sending their children into CAIPI?</strong></td>
<td>I-2. How did you decide to enroll your child or children in a pre-school program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-2a. Why did you enroll your child in the CAIPI program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-2b. What do you hope the CAIPI program will do for your child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ1. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in</strong></td>
<td>I-2c. How important do you think the CAIPI program is for your child, and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CAIPI intervention describe the importance of the program?

RQ3. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention make decisions about attendance? I-3. How would you describe your experience as a mother working with the CAIPI staff?

I-3a. What particular things make you feel good about sending your child to this program?

I-3b. What particular things make you less happy about sending your child to this program?

RQ4. What are the circumstances that contribute to or detract the children’s attendance rate?

I-4. How would you describe your child’s experience attending the CAIPI program?

I-4a. What does your child say about his or her experiences at the CAIPI program?

I-4b. How would you describe the value of those experiences for your child?

I-4c. What do you think is happening in CAIPI?

I-4d. How do you think your child occupy the time in the CAIPI?
RQ3. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention make decisions about attendance?

I-5. How would you describe your child’s attendance at the CAIPI program?

I-5a. Does he or she miss many sessions? If so, what are some of the reasons your child misses or does not attend sessions?

I-5b. What helps you maintain regular attendance for your child? What gets in the way of regular attendance?

RQ1. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in CAIPI intervention describe the importance of the program?

I-6. Overall, how important do you feel it is for your child to participate in a pre-school program? Why?

I-6a. If you have younger children, will you send them to the CAIPI program?

I-b. Why or why not?
Appendix E

Interview Reflections
INTERVIEW REFLECTIONS

For the study of,

‘‘Parents and guardians perspectives regarding attendance: evidence from a governmental early childhood education and care program.’’

This interview reflection template was adapted from El Geberi (2017).


Purpose

Understand the factors that are influencing mothers, father, and guardian decisions’ regarding attendance of their children younger than five years in the governmentally funded program called Comprehensive Care Centers focused on Early Childhood (CAIPI, acronyms in Spanish). This is an interview protocol for the following research questions:

1. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children who are enrolled in the CAIPI program describe the importance of the program?
2. How mothers, fathers, and guardians of children enrolled in the CAIPI program make decisions about attendance?
3. What are the circumstances that contribute to or detract children’s attendance rate?
Interviewer reflection

Instructions: After the respondent leaves the room, please take a couple of minutes to indicate your reactions and observations about the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent ID No.:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of Interview:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please describe the respondent’s attitude toward you and the interview:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please describe any unusual circumstances and/or events that had any bearing on the interview such as interruptions, language difficulty, etc.:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you assess his/her knowledge based on the information that she/he gave to you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: October 30, 2018

To: Regena Nelson, Principal Investigator
    Ria Cruz, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 18-10-16

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Perspectives Regarding Attendance: Evidence from a Governmental Early Childhood Education and Care Program” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., you must request a post-approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: October 29, 2019
Appendix G

INAIP’s Approval Letter
MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ATENCIÓN INTEGRAL A LA PRIMERA INFANCIA

“Año del Fomento de las Exportaciones”

INAIP-DG-18-0746

Santo Domingo, D.N.
09 de noviembre del 2018

Señora
Rita Liceiot Cruz S.
Estudiante de Doctorado
Western Michigan University (WMU)
Ciudad.

Distinguida Sra. Cruz,

Luego de extenderle un cordial saludo y dando respuesta a su comunicación con fecha 29 de octubre del presente año, para realizar su investigación sobre los Centros de Atención Integral a la Primera Infancia (CAIPI) del Instituto Nacional de Atención Integral a la Primera Infancia (INAIP), mediante la cual se le autoriza hacer el estudio de tesis doctoral “Perspectivas de los padres o tutores sobre asistencia: evidencia de un programa público de atención integral a la primera infancia”, en las redes de servicio del INAIPI.

Agradeciendo de antemano su interés y propósitos de reclutar participantes en el estudio ya mencionado. Deseándole que sea todo un éxito, y que nosotros como parte del INAIPI podamos ser de gran ayuda para su investigación, pero sobre todo confiando en que su solicitud sea acogida de manera positiva, queda de ustedes,

Atentamente,

[En la imagen, la firma está rotulada como “Licda. Berlinesa Franco” y “Directora General”]

BF/gds

(809) 545-5147 info@inaipi.gob.do www.inaiipi.gob.do