

2019

Caribbean Students' Experience of Readiness for the Secondary Education Certificate Exam

Cleon Pauline Athill
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Cleon Pauline Beatrice Athill

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Robert Meyer, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Kimberly McCann, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Medha Talpade, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2019

Abstract

Caribbean Students' Experience of Readiness for the Secondary Education Certificate

Exam

by

Cleon Pauline Beatrice Athill

MA, Vermont College, Norwich University, 1993

BSc, Howard University, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

While there is general agreement about its importance, the construct of educational readiness is nebulous with much debate about what constitutes readiness. Readiness has been found to be a multidimensional psychological construct from a psychometric perspective. However, there is a growing awareness that this psychometric focus is lopsided, and that readiness does not only reside in the child. Further, there is an accompanying appreciation that readiness research may need to focus more on the subjective experience of individuals within the context of their environment. This phenomenological study, using Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model, explored how Antigua and Barbudan students experienced readiness as they prepared to take the 2017 Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Exam (CSEC). In an interview, each of the 12 participants recounted their experience as they readied themselves for the CSEC. The data were analyzed through content and framework analysis. The results support findings in the literature that showed that readiness is a complex and iterative process. It is the result of the dynamic interplay of various inputs of a host of individuals functioning at different levels of the readiness system. These results can then provide a point of entry for both national dialogue and policy formulation culminating in the provision of comprehensive services to support students' readiness experiences. The ultimate hope is that readiness for the CSEC Exam will lead to actual success on the exams, which in turn will translate into improved life chances of Antigua and Barbudan students.

Caribbean Students' Experience of Readiness for the Caribbean Secondary Education

Certificate Exam

by

Cleon Pauline Beatrice Athill

MA, Vermont College, Norwich University, 1993

BSc., Howard University, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

Walden University

May 2019

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two sons Yohance and Tijani Mottley.

Acknowledgments

My Walden journey has been an incredible experience. From course work to dissertation; from writing through rewriting; from the excitement of thought, through the anxiety of committing these to paper, to the anticipation of feedback; from an indistinguishable voice to a powerful scholarly voice fueled by a passion for social change, Walden has nurtured me. And for this I am eternally grateful.

In addition to Walden, there are a host of individuals who have helped me along this journey and to all, I am expressing immeasurable gratitude. Specifically, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my Committee Chairs Dr. Krista Robertson, and Dr. Robert Meyer, and Committee members Dr. Kimberlie McCann and Dr. Medha Talpade for their individual and collective support and guidance that allowed me to produce work of exemplary scholarship, befitting the Walden seal.

Thanks to the Organization of American States and the Board of Education (Antigua and Barbuda) for providing financial support for my studies at Walden. Thanks to the Director of Education of Antigua and Barbuda, and the parents of site schools for their support as I conducted the research for the dissertation. Special thanks to the participants and their parents for their interest in and willingness to contribute to this research project.

Nobody has provided me more grounding and internal resolve to embark upon this journey and see it through than my two mentors Dame Eusalyn Lewis and Dr. Edris Bird. Their belief in my academic abilities as well as their constant nudge to pursue this doctoral study have turned into a mantra for me. It is my hope that through this

scholarship I can do at least as half as much as they have done in their commitment to transformational social change in Antigua and Barbuda.

Additionally, profoundest thanks to the Ministry of Education, the National Library, and participants of this study and their the parents for the respective inputs that allowed me to undertake and complete this study.

Thanks also to my circle for ‘girlfriends’ and my Movement family for helping to fuel the passion necessary for sustained work at this level. Of special note, is the consistent support of my sister friends Famarla, Anique, Jeannette, and Hyacinth, and brother friends Swanson and Cameron, which I can never repay. Thank you all.

Finally, but by no means the least important, is the love and support of my immediate and extended family. Special thanks to my sons Tijani and Yohance. My hope is that my doctoral journey will be an inspiration to them and so I dedicate this dissertation to them. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background	2
Problem Statement	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Conceptual Framework	7
Research Questions	8
Nature of the Study	9
Qualitative Research Design	9
Definitions	12
Assumptions of the Study	12
Scope and Delimitations	13
Limitations	14
Ethical Issues	14
Significance of the Study	14
Summary	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
The Present Study and its Context	17
The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Exam	19

Search Strategy	22
Overview of the Literature Review.....	23
Readiness in the Literature.....	24
Definitions of Readiness	25
Conceptions of Readiness	27
Readiness as Skills and Abilities	28
Readiness as Personal Attribute.....	29
Readiness as a Process	29
Readiness as a Function of Identity	30
Social-Ecological Perspective: Integrating Conceptions of Readiness	35
Gaps in the Literature.....	40
Theory-Approach-Method Alignment	41
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	43
Research Design and Rationale	43
Research Questions	43
Research Design.....	44
Role of the Researcher	46
Methodology.....	47
Population	47
Sampling and Sample	48
Instrumentation	50

Data Collection Process	51
Data Treatment and Storage.....	52
Data Analysis	53
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	54
Limitations	56
Ethical Issues	56
Significance of the Study	57
Summary.....	57
Chapter 4: Results.....	58
Setting	59
Demographics	60
Data Collection	61
The Phenomenological Process and the Interview	65
Reflective Journal	67
Presentation of Data.....	67
Data Analysis	73
Results	75
Emergent Themes	75
Theme 1: CSEC is Very Important.....	76
Theme 2: Teachers as an Important Readiness Factor.....	78
Theme 3: Student Factors and Attributes.....	83

Theme 4. Peers Support and Influence	89
Theme 5: Parents, Home, and Family Factors	92
Theme 6: Social and Cultural factors.....	96
Theme 7: Readiness versus not readiness.....	98
Theme 8: School Factors	106
Theme 9: Stress and Coping	109
Theme 10: Challenges.....	116
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	119
Bracketing	119
Reflective Journal	120
Summary	121
Chapter 5.....	123
Summary of Findings.....	123
Interpretation.....	124
Social-ecological theory.....	124
The Readiness Circle	129
The Confidence Loop	135
Being Ready versus Not being Ready	137
The Readiness Experience: A Process	137
The Readiness Experience: A State	140
Not Ready	141

Readiness: Composite or Unitary	142
Readiness Challenges.....	143
Limitations	145
Recommendations.....	146
Support of Students.....	146
Extracurricular Activities.....	147
Increasing Accessibility to Critical Resources	148
Proper Deployment of Teachers	148
Teacher Preparation and Resourceful	149
Implications for Social Change.....	149
Conclusions.....	150
References.....	152
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	167
Letter for the Participation by Community Partner.....	163

List of Tables

Table 1.	Theme 1: CSEC Exam is Important.....	73
2	Theme 2: Teachers as an Important Readiness Factor...	77
3	Theme 3: Student Factors and Attributes.....	83
4	Theme 4: Peer Support and Influence.....	87
5	Theme 5: Parents, Home, and Family Factors.....	90
6	Theme 6: Social and Cultural Factors.....	92
7	Readiness Qualities Identified by Participants.....	93
8	Theme 7B: Readiness Attributes.....	98
9	Theme 8: School Factors.....	102
10	Theme 9: Stress and Coping.....	108
11	Theme 10: Challenges.....	111
12	Establishing Trustworthiness.....	114

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Research questions with thematic associations	71
2	Socio-ecological model of students' readiness experience. Level inputs that significantly determine students' CSEC readiness experience.....	119
3	The Readiness Circle.....	127
4	The Confidence Loop. Confidence: A function of ownership, interest, and efficacy.....	128

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Readiness has been demonstrated as critical to academic success and success in life. Consequently, the relatively low success rate (39%) of students on the CSEC exam (Ministry of Education, 2015) has triggered much concern given that the performance on this exam has life-defining consequences (Di Gropello, 2003; Stewart, 2015). It is for this reason that the readiness of Antiguan and Barbudan students to negotiate the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Exam (CSEC) exam is of national concern. Success on the exam increases the likelihood that high school graduates have access to good employment and higher education opportunities. It is a logical conclusion then that improving students' level of readiness would have direct implications for their life chances. However, the question remains as to what readiness is and how is this experienced by students preparing for the CSEC Exam. A growing recognition of the limitations of psychometric measures, points to the need for more subjective understanding of readiness. For this study I used the phenomenological approach, as it allowed for the exploration of students' lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest. My goal was to understand students' experiences of readiness as they prepared for the CSEC Examination. It is my hope that the findings will be used by the Ministry of Education to inform their policies and practices regarding supporting students in their preparation for the CSEC Exam. This study then has direct implications for students' performance on the CSEC Exam, which in turn has implications for their *life chances*. Weber (1864) described life chances as the chances an individual must optimize opportunities that are available in a given society to improve quality of life.

This chapter presents a synopsis of the study by addressing the critical elements: (a) background, that contextualizes the phenomenon to be studied; (b) the problem statement; (c) the purpose of the study; (d) conceptual framework; (e) research question; (f) the nature of the study; (g) assumptions of the study; (h) scope and delimitations; (i) limitations of the study; (j) ethical issues; and (k) social significance. The chapter then ends in a summary that provides a lead into Chapter 2.

Background

Concerns about academic performance and its relationship to the life chances of students have attracted much attention, not only in development circles but also in academic spheres as well. Further, concerns about its impact on family and community vitality, and on the development trajectory of small island states such as Antigua and Barbuda, have driven much of the focus and research on the construct of readiness (UNICEF, 2012). While there is general agreement that readiness is an important psychological construct, there is also recognition that it is nebulous. Additionally, there is much debate with respect to what constitutes readiness and about the processes involved (Duncan et al., 2007; House of Commons, 2012; Le et al., 2006). Readiness has been shown to have diverse applications and the research topography attests to this. A growing number of studies have focused on readiness and its implications for early childhood education and they have established a strong positive correlation between academic success at kindergarten levels and school readiness (Duncan et al., 2007; Le et al., 2006; McGettigan & Gray, 2012). This positive association between school readiness and academic achievement at the kindergarten level is supported by studies that show similar

effect in other areas in an academic setting. For example, readiness is positively correlated with general academic performance at higher levels of schooling, such as secondary school and college (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012; Yıldırım, 2012), as well as on performance in courses and programs, such as social work (Waldman, Glover, & King, 1999), nursing (Dobinson-Harrington, 2006), mathematics (Linder, Ramey, & Zambak, 2013), and physics (Ramnarain & Molefe, 2012). Further, readiness was shown to be important for the successful undertaking of activities and processes that are not related to a formal learning situation. These include areas or domains such as psychotherapy (Burlew, Montgomery, Kosinski, & Forcehimes, 2013), community transformation (Rosas, Behar, & Hydaker, 2014), and organizational change (Weiner, 2009).

The focus of much of this work has been on understanding the multidimensional nature of readiness as a psychological construct from a psychometric perspective. Consequently, there now exist several instruments that have been developed to measure students' readiness with the attending assumptions that the derived scores are reliable predictors of achievement (Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale, 2012; Kindergarten Readiness Test; Gesell Developmental Observation–Revised 2012; Bracken School Readiness Assessment, 2002). For example, literacy, numeracy, ability to follow directions, working well with other children, and engaging in learning activities have been identified as powerful predictors of general school readiness, which then later predicts academic performance (Duncan et al., 2007; Le et al., 2006; Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan 2005). Readiness is also seen as a strong predictor of success. It is for this reason that students are given a qualifying test or mock CSEC Exam. The

resulting grades are then used as a gauge as to whether they will pass that subject at CSEC.

The CSEC Exam is a regional exam taken by school students at the end of secondary education. Successful performance on this exam increases the likelihood that high school graduates have access to good employment and higher education opportunities (Di Gropello, 2003; Stewart, 2015; World Bank/ Blom & Hobbs, 2008). As such, it can be surmised that students' level of readiness to negotiate the CSEC has important implications for their life chances, meaning the opportunities that the individual is able to capitalize to improve his or her quality of life. It is for this reason that students' readiness to negotiate this exam is a significant national concern in Antigua and Barbuda. In this study I address readiness and how is this experienced by students preparing for the CSEC Exam.

A review of the extant literature revealed an emphasis in readiness research on developing objective measures and establishing the psychometrics of this concept. This has led to an understanding of readiness as a function of maturation, development, and chronological age. However, there is the view that this focus on psychological development offers a limited and lopsided view of readiness, because readiness does not only reside in the student. This is accompanied by an appreciation that readiness research needs to focus more attention on the subjective experience of students within their environment (Robottom, 2008). Consequently, there is growing interest in, and a growing body of work that focuses on the experiential. Waldman, Glover, and King (1999) contended that self-awareness, reflexivity, and students' perception of their own

needs are important elements of readiness. Brown and Benson (2005) supported the importance of self-reflection to readiness but also showed how processes of self-reflection, feedback, and support have important implications for readiness. Also, Gondo, Patterson, and Palacios (2013) proffered that readiness is a function of an individual's mindfulness of habit and belief in relation to change. They have provided important insights into the self-processes/cognitive processes involved in the construct of readiness and have contributed to an appreciation for readiness as a complex, multidimensional construct.

The diverse models that have been offered to explain the construct of readiness is indicative of the complexity and multidimensionality of this psychological phenomenon. Identity, self-efficacy, and academic literacies models stress the importance of self-processes and readiness. Further, theories such as the learning community and family investment, and family stress models emphasize factors that have significant implications for readiness. Integrated feminist theory and the community cultural wealth, cultural capital theory, systems coherence and alignment theory all point to yet other factors that impact on one's readiness. Arnold, Lu, and Armstrong (2011), drawing on the social ecological model, discussed student readiness and the interplay of factors at the micro level, meso level, and exo levels. Their extensive work supports the choice I made for the social ecological model to be the conceptual lens for this study.

These studies along with many others are a start to the illumination of our understanding of this fundamental psychology construct. It is the expectation that this study joins and contributes to this dialogue in a significant way. Specifically, because

there is nothing in the literature with respect to the readiness experience in relation to the CSEC Examination, this will fill this gap. Most importantly, as a researcher in a developing country, it is my intention to shed light on the important psychological phenomenon of readiness. Further, I intend to bring visibility to an under-researched population (secondary school students) in an under-researched sociocultural context (the Caribbean region, but more specifically, Antigua and Barbuda).

Problem Statement

It has already been established that readiness is not just an important psychological state, but also that it is a critical antecedent for the successful undertaking of any activity. Consequently, since the CSEC Exam, the national school-leaving exam, is life-defining for Antiguan and Barbudan students. Their readiness to take this exam has tremendous implications for the students, for their families, and for the country. Readiness, however, is seen to be a complex psychological construct; and there is growing awareness that the common theories (mostly derived from quantitative approaches), which tend towards biocognitive explanations, do not fully capture its magnitude and depth. So, questions such as: What is readiness?; how is it experienced?; how is the state of readiness for taking the CSEC Exam qualitatively different from a state of not-readiness for taking the CSEC Exam?; how does one know that one has reached this threshold? what are the factors that are critical to one reaching this threshold?, become points of interest for this research inquiry. It is my contention that exploration into the subjective experience of readiness could complement already

established understandings of readiness, and further could elucidate this fundamental psychological construct.

The research was not only spawned out of the realization of the dearth of local information with respect to the research phenomenon, but also out of an awareness of the gap in the literature on readiness relating to the subjective experience of readiness in the context of the CSEC. This study is intended to fill both gaps.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experience of readiness for Antigua and Barbudan students as they prepared to sit the CSEC Examination. At the most basic level and at the beginning of this research, readiness was conceived as a multidimensional construct, involving complex processes, operating simultaneously at different levels; and further the extent to which students are prepared to enter and participate in an undertaking such as the CSEC Exam (Holton Bates & Ruona, 2000). The phenomenological approach, then, allowed for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of readiness from students' perspective, and so is expected to gather data that will fill this gap in the literature. Semistructured interviews allowed for the kind of in-depth exploration that would illuminate this important psychological phenomenon.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study drew on the social ecological system model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner, the student exists in an environment of nested spheres and each of these contribute individually and collectively to the development and the experiences of the student. The

child, who is located at the epicenter, exists in the context of the family and school, which exist within the community, which exists within the greater social, cultural, economic and political context. The model illuminates the symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between the learner and the environment.

Given this framework, readiness can be viewed as a function of interlocking systems of relationships, structures, role, supports, values, and so on. At its most basic level, it is a positive experience or state that is supportive of learning and transmission of skills and values. Dobinson-Harrington (2006) explored the tutor-tutee relationship and the processes involved in the transference of skills, readiness as a function of supportive encounters. Readiness, then, is the extent to which one is willing to enter and participate, such that knowledge and skills are transferred and acquired (Holton Bates, & Ruona, 2000). The processes, relationships, roles, values, interactions, and expectations, in the social environment then dictate the readiness experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989; 2005).

The social-ecological model, a multidimensional model, was chosen to explore the phenomenon of readiness, itself a multidimensional construct. The phenomenological approach allowed for exploration of the concept to appreciate the interplay of forces at and between the various levels.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are Antiguan and Barbudan students' experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC examination?

Research Question 1 Subquestions:

1. What does it mean to students to be ready for the CSEC Exam?
2. What are some key readiness issues as students prepare for the CSEC Exam?
3. What readiness activities do students participate in leading up to the CSEC Exam?
4. What is the meaning of readiness for students as they reflect on their preparation for the CSEC Exam?

Research Question 2: How do students experience support as they prepare?

Research Question 2 Subquestions:

5. What are the supports that contribute to the experience of readiness?
6. What supports are experienced as counterproductive?

Nature of the Study

Qualitative Research Design

This doctoral study adopted an interpretivist paradigm. This philosophical orientation holds that reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially. In keeping with this ontology, the study used the qualitative approach which is regarded as a suitable method for exploring subjective reality and meaning (Creswell, 2009; Pascal, 2010). Further, the qualitative approach is warranted when building new knowledge and theories for understanding the complexities of the human experience. Students' experiences of readiness are recognized not only as being a multidimensional in nature but also as a complex process; and as such it warrants exploration through in-depth methods associated with the qualitative approach. Additionally, there is also a tacit recognition by

some researchers that quantitative approaches do not adequately describe the complex world of the secondary school student. Robotham (2008) for example, supported the use of qualitative methods to explore an issue as complex and dynamic as students' readiness experiences. For this study, then, I used the phenomenological approach, as this allows for a description of the lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon as shared by several individuals (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). My goal was to understand and to describe students' experiences of readiness as they prepared for the CSEC Examination. Twelve students selected through purposive sampling, reflected on and described their experiences as they prepared for the CSEC Exam. They were interviewed as soon as possible after they wrote the CSEC Exam and the information gathered provided the data from which the rich description of the phenomenon was derived.

At this stage of my research, readiness was broadly conceived as the extent to which students are prepared to enter and participate in any undertaking (Holton Bates, & Ruona, 2000). For this study, I employed exploratory data gathering tools, such as the semi structured interview, to capture the rich textual data that was analyzed for themes that described the textual and structural aspects of the phenomenon.

Data analysis. Qualitative data analysis involves the exploration of textual data for patterns and themes and determines how these patterns and themes help answer the research questions under consideration. According to Taylor and Gibbs (2010), this is an iterative, cyclical, progressive, and organic process, quite unlike the linear process of quantitative research. Generally, qualitative analysis takes place on two levels. The first level is the general level where the data is summarized and analysed. The second level is

the analysis that is embedded in the specific qualitative design (Creswell, 2014). For the phenomenological study, as this one is, the researcher analyses rich textual data to derive what is referred to as “essence description” (Creswell, 2014; Groenewald, 2004).

For this study, data analysis was carried out through content analysis and framework analysis. Content analysis involves the categorization of textual data. Here, the raw data was combed in order to classify, summarize, and tabulate the raw data, marking the beginning of data organization. Framework analysis involves the following activities: (a) transcribing and reading the data, (b) identifying a thematic framework using a priori (based on the literature) and emerging themes and issues, (c) coding in accordance with these a priori and emerging themes, (d) charting the themes, and (e) mapping and interpreting the themes (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). The conceptual framework, loosely providing the framework for data analysis, was supported by social ecological model. I was cognizant that new themes can emerge, and so analysis was done deductively as well as inductively (Creswell, 2014). QSR NVivo has been shown to be a useful tool (Walsh, 2003). It allows for efficient data management, data organization, and efficient facilitates coding. Consequently, I utilized it to facilitate the data analysis for this research project.

Role of researcher. Unlike the quantitative researcher who takes a sterile, objective stance in the analysis process, the qualitative researcher is intimately involved in the entire research process. Consequently, as the researcher, I engaged in constant self-reflection to increase my awareness of my values, biases, and assumptions relating to both the phenomenon and the participants. Bracketing, a strategy used in

phenomenological research to keep these from influencing the research process (Patton, 2002), was facilitated by journaling and memoing (Tufford, 2012). These strategies, along with member checking (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002), were among the strategies that I used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

Definitions

CSEC Exam: The CSEC Examination. Students in the Caribbean region take the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), which is offered by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), at the end of the tenure of their secondary school education

School leavers (secondary school students): School leavers are students whose secondary school tenure would have culminated in their sitting of the CSEC. Students who leave school prematurely are known as *drop-outs*.

Readiness: Readiness is the extent to which one is willing to enter and participate in an activity such as the CSEC, such that knowledge and skills are transferred and acquired (Holton Bates, & Ruona, 2000).

Subjective experience of readiness: This refers to an individual's personal experience of readiness as gathered through first-person data. (Lutz & Thompson, 2003)

After-class: This refers to classes offered by teachers or persons who are knowledgeable in the subject area to students preparing for the CSEC, outside of the regular school day, and usually a cost to students.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The research design is best suited to provide the best answer to the research question.
2. The sample size of 12 students is appropriate for the study.
3. The researcher is optimally utilized as the instrument.
4. Student-participants provided honest and insightful answers.
5. Students correctly recall their experience of readiness for the CSEC, given that the interview was conducted after they wrote the exam.
6. The theoretical and empirical assumptions on which the study is based are appropriate and valid.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to explore the readiness experiences of students who sat the June sitting of the CSEC Examination in Antigua and Barbuda. Consequently, participants were drawn only from the list of Registrants for the June 2017 sitting. They were secondary school registrants taking the CESC Examinations for the very first time at culmination of their secondary education and they were interviewed as soon as possible after they sat the exam. The interview schedule that guided the interview consisted questions that sought to understand the levels and factors of influence impacting students experience and meaning of readiness in the context of the CSEC Exam. Additionally, the social-ecological model was deemed the best model to explore the phenomenon given the multidimensionality of the readiness construct.

Further, given the cultural context and the structure of the CSEC Exam, end users of this study will be able to relate to the context and so they will be able to use the findings in their own specific situations.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that participants were asked to recall their experience of the phenomenon. Therefore, the study relied on the accuracy of their memories. It was for this reason why students were interviewed in a school-related site. Hindsight bias and self-serving bias could have affected how students recalled their experiences.

Ethical Issues

I was cognizant of the obligation to safeguard the interest and wellbeing of the participants. As such, ethical issues that needed to be addressed included (a) the probable inclusion of the minors in the study and (b) the social position of the researcher, which could translate in social desirability and researcher effects. These were addressed through a robust informed consent process (parental consent and minor assent), which ensured that participants did not know me, rigorous and sensitive data collection process and careful attention to the management of data.

Significance of the Study

The study has both theoretical significance and local significance. Theoretically, I seek to extend the literature by expanding on students' experience of readiness as they prepare for a life-defining examination. Further, its focus on secondary school in the Caribbean region, which is generally an under-researched social space, will contribute to the literature's panoptic value with respect to this psychological construct. The local

significance is because (a) there is a dearth of local research generally, and (b) this study is expected to expand on a phenomenon of cultural, social, and economic relevance and importance. I intend to use the findings of this study to provide insight into the dynamics and processes involved in students' exam preparation leading up to their negotiation of the CSEC Exam. Consequently, these findings may have direct impact for students in terms of informing both policy and practice. Both the Ministry of Education and school administration can use these findings to support the provision of support services for fifth form students to maximize their chances of doing well on the Exam.

Summary

Understanding the process of readiness could have important implications for students' performance on the CSEC Exam. Through this study therefore I sought to explore students' experiences of readiness as they prepared for the CSEC Exam. The social ecological systems model provided the frame for this phenomenological inquiry, the findings of which are intended to have a direct impact on national policy relating to exam support for secondary school leavers. Chapter 2, the upcoming chapter, presents the extant literature. It explores the extent to which the literature illuminates our understanding of this psychological construct and unearths a gap that begs further inquiry. Further, it establishes the social ecological systems model as the conceptual lens for this inquiry as I sought to fill this gap.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The link between readiness, performance, and change has long been established in the field of education (Meisels, 1998). Further, concerns about academic performance and its implications for students' positive outcomes, for the improvement of the socioeconomic status of families and communities, and for positively impacting economic development of countries, particularly underdeveloped and developing countries like Antigua and Barbuda (UNICEF, 2012) have driven much of the debate in the region about educational reform. Additionally, the awareness that educational achievement is an outcome of readiness has driven much of the focus and research on the construct of readiness (Her, 2014). While there is consensus about the role and importance of readiness, it remains nebulous, and a difficult construct to operationally define; similarly, the processes responsible for readiness are difficult to define (Duncan et al., 2007; Le, Kirby, Barney, Setodji, & Gershwin, 2006). Most of the studies though have focused on readiness as a developmental construct (Ionescu & Benga, 2007). For example, a growing number of studies have focused on readiness and early childhood education and have established a strong positive correlation between success at the kindergarten level and readiness for school (Duncan et al., 2007; Le et al., 2006; McGettigan & Gray, 2012). This positive association between school readiness and achievement is further supported by studies that show the importance of readiness at higher levels of schooling, such as secondary school and college (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012; Yildirim, 2012), or its impact on success at particular courses and programmes, such as social work (Waldman, Glover, & King, 1999), nursing (Dobinson-Harrington,

2006), mathematics (Linder, Ramey, & Zambak, 2013) and physics (Ramnarain & Molefe, 2012), or those that are not even related to a formal learning situation, such as therapy (Abel, 2011), community transformation (Rosas, Behar, & Hydaker, 2014), organizational change (Weiner, 2009), and rites of passage (Pierr, 2007).

In this chapter I establish the context for the exploration of the research question. First, I situate the phenomenon of interest within its cultural context, then I explore the research landscape by providing a comprehensive view of how readiness is conceived in the literature. Finally, I present the social ecological model as a means of synthesizing these various conceptions of readiness as well as a framework that anchors the study with the readiness research landscape.

The Present Study and its Context

Through this study I explored the experience of readiness for students taking the regional school-leaving and qualifying exam, The CSEC Examination. Students in the Caribbean region take the CSEC Exam, which is offered by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), at the end of the tenure of their secondary school education. The level of preparation, readiness, and application at the Exam have significant implications for students and families. Success at the CSEC Exam translates into more opportunities for students, as they are better able to pursue employment opportunities, and negotiate better pay packages, as well as capitalize limited opportunities to pursue higher education (Blom & Hobbs, 2007; Di Gropello, 2003). In any case, success at the CSEC Exam translates into better opportunities for students (Blom & Hobbs, 2007). Success at the CSEC Exam also means improved circumstances for their families, either through

improved social standing or improved economic status or both. Success also reaps dividends at the macro level. Having students who are ready to sit, and who successfully negotiate the CSEC Exam as a result, has significant economic implications for fledging economies like Antigua and Barbuda (Blom & Hobbs, 2007; Di Gropello, 2003; Hickling-Hudson, 2004). It is, therefore, comprehensible that the issue of readiness to sit the CSEC Exam would be of national concern for Antigua and Barbuda, a small economy with no natural resources save its human capital.

Concerns about readiness for the CSEC Exam characterize the national discourse on the status of education in the country immediately before the annual sitting of the exams and after results are published, in an almost ritualistic manner. The recurring themes include: (a) students' ability to reproduce for the exam the content covered during their coursework and (b) the extent to which the Ministry of Education, schools, teachers, and parents would have contributed to students' performance (Di Gropello, 2003; Stewart, 2015). Therefore, readying students for the CSEC Exam is recognized nationally as an important undertaking, with various stakeholders having distinct inputs into this readying process (Blom & Hobbs, 2008; Stewart, 2015). The Ministry of Education may respond by improving the teaching stock, schools may respond by tightening schedules and timetabling, and parents may respond by providing more resources such as providing personal tutors or extra lessons (Stewart, 2015). However, the question remains as to what readiness is and how is this experienced by students preparing for the CSEC Exam

The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Exam

At the end of their fifth year, secondary school students who would have progressed steadily through secondary school are expected to take exams in various subjects at the CSEC Exam. The CSEC Examinations is one of the exam clusters offered by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). The CXC was spawned from discussions about regional identity and the need for a once colonized people to take charge of their destiny by charting a “new direction in education that reflected a Caribbean ethos” (Griffith, 2009, p.40). A Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Agreement then established the CXC in 1972 to replace the UK- based General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations that were taken by secondary school students at the end of their fifth year (CARICOM, 2011). Students from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, the Netherland Antilles, and Suriname are now able to sit one regional exam set around common curricular areas that identify common objectives (CARICOM, 2011).

The establishment of the CXC forced policy, institutional, and pedagogic changes that saw a complete overhaul, albeit incrementally, of the education system at all levels throughout the Anglophone Caribbean (Hickling-Hudson, 2004). Ministries of Education and schools were called upon to make important changes with respect to infrastructure, human resources, and course offerings (CXC, 2015). In the same vein, teachers and

students had to acquaint themselves with the new material, methodology, and the changed exam regime and associated protocols (CXC, 2015).

One of the most significant changes was that CXC accommodated more course offerings and students are now able to pursue and be tested in more academic, technical, and vocational subjects or courses for CSEC (Griffith, 2009). Exams are offered in 34 subjects to include agricultural science, biology, chemistry, physics, integrated science, human and social biology, English language (English A), English literature (English B), social studies, geography, Caribbean history, metallurgical science, mathematics, principles of accounts, principles of business, economics, office procedures, building technology, technical drawing, French, Spanish, electrical engineering technology, mechanical engineering, information technology, physical education, food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, home management, visual and performing arts, and electronic document preparation and management (CXC, 2015). Notwithstanding this number of courses or subject offerings, a normal CSEC load as per the normal school timetable, is eight subjects. However, based upon the results of a mock exam, students can take more or less than eight subjects at the CSEC Exam. The current trend is for students to take far more subjects above the normal load. For the 2015 and then again for the 2016 CSEC Examinations, one student in Antigua and Barbuda was able to sit exams in 22 subjects and pass them all respectively. (Ministry of Education, 2015, 2016)

CXC Exams are criterion-referenced. This means that students are evaluated against established performance standards that indicate the level of mastery with respect to key concepts, knowledge, skills, and competencies required by each syllabus (CXC,

2015). The CSEC Examinations are graded using a six-point grading system as follows: Grade I is awarded for comprehensive understanding; Grade II is awarded for good understanding; Grade III is awarded for a fairly good understanding; Grade IV is awarded for a moderate understanding; Grade V is awarded for a limited understanding; and Grade VI is awarded for a very limited understanding (CXC, 2015). Success at the CSEC Exam is based on the number of subjects passed and the quality of the passes. Consequently, a student who passes eight subjects with all grade ones is considered to have done better than a student passing the same number of subjects with other grade configurations.

Successful performance on these exams has very important implications for students. Therefore, the issue of readiness for the exams is doubly important. In fact, students are being prepared for the exams at least two academic years before, with increased preparation and anxiety, as the CSEC Exam approaches. The stakes are high for school, teachers and parents, and this sense of import is seen in the increased attention given to students during this period of preparation. Students who understand the significance of the exam also tend to revise schedules, dropping or reducing social activities, and increase studying. Notwithstanding this, many students remain indifferent and unconcerned, and parents and teachers complain that they are “not focused” and worry that they will not do well at the CSEC Exam. Students’ readiness to sit the CSEC Exam is, therefore, seen as critical for the successful negotiation of the CESC Exam (Stewart, 2015). My interest in this phenomenon of readiness, therefore, has taken shape out of this reality. It is my hope that exploring the phenomenon of readiness in the

context of the CSEC Exam will lead to new understandings that will not only add value to the literature in a significant way but will also inform policy and practice that will support students' successful performance on the CSEC Exam over the years.

Search Strategy

To survey the work done about and to explore the literature on this topic, I employed the following strategy. First, I identified the key terms and concepts in the research topic: Antiguan and Barbudan Students' Experience of Readiness for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Exam. These terms were "students," "readiness," and "Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Exam." Second, I listed several synonyms for each of these keywords and these two sets of words constituted the initial pool of keywords (students, learners, high school students, secondary school students, readiness, preparation, test, test taking, exam taking, high-stakes tests, exits tests, CSEC, academic success) that facilitated my initial search. Third, using the Walden Library, I undertook keyword searches on subject databases (Psychology, Education) such as PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and Education Search Complete, and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and on interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary databases such as Sage Primer, Academic Search Complete, and Expanded Academic ASAP. For example, on PsycINFO, a search using the keyword "readiness," yielded 3,643 articles. However, a combination of keywords *readiness*, *students*, and *test-taking* yielded only three articles, and a change from *test-taking* to *test taking* yielded five articles. A search including other psychology databases (PsycARTICLES, PsychEXTRA) yielded the same five articles. When Education Research Complete and SocIndex were

added for the same search words (*readiness, test-taking, students*), the search yielded 41 articles. Boolean operators were also used to expand search options. Hence, with the use of the Boolean operator ‘or’, or the use of bracket such as “(*student readiness*)”, the previous searches yielded 47 articles. Other search words and search word combinations used in addition to above searches included *academic success, CSEC, CSEC preparation and readiness experience, CSEC and opportunities, life chances, opportunities* and this yielded 55 articles. It is of note that search words *CSEC, academic success, readiness*, yielded no results using Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Education Search Complete, and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC).

In addition to the databases accessed through the Walden Library, I also explored Google Scholar and the Internet. However, these sources yielded nine articles that were relevant to the topic under study. I also mined the references of the articles that I found from my initial search of the above databases, and this strategy led me to other peer reviewed journals that yielded some interesting and useful articles

Overview of the Literature Review

It was immediately apparent from a scan of the articles found that the construct of ‘readiness’ was the focus of study in many and varied contexts. Consequently, the organization of the literature review developed organically as a response to me finding my way through this research landscape. First, I present a bird’s eye view of the readiness research landscape; second, I explore the various definitions of readiness. Third, I present various conception of readiness. Fourth, I present the socio-ecological theory as a means of synthesizing the various views, and then present this theory as the conceptual lens for

the study. Next, I identify gaps in the literature and suggest how this study would contribute to this important discourse on readiness. Finally, I present the phenomenological approach as the most appropriate approach for exploring the research question, a transition to

Readiness in the Literature

It is clear from the extant literature, and from the varying perspectives that readiness is a fundamental psychological construct. It is basic to any growth process and necessary for the successful undertaking of an activity or task. Whether it is to transition from childhood to adulthood (Piert, 2007), or to navigate the early childhood education curriculum (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 2006; Iruka, La Forett, & Odom, 2012; Linder et al., 2013; McGettigan & Gray, 2012; Miller et al., 2013; Weigel & Martin, 2006), or to succeed at high school or college (Conley, & French, 2014; Francis, 2006; Gomez-Arizaga & Conejeros-Solar, 2014; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012; Leonard, 2013; Mora, 2011; Schaefer, 2014; Schaefer & Rivera, 2012; Strayhorn, 2014) or to transition into a career or work-related targets (McDonald & Khan, 2014; Schaefer & Rivera, 2012), or to realize organizational change (Stevens, 2013; Weiner, 2009), or to achieve therapeutic goals (Carroll, Ashman, Bower, & Hemingway, 2013; Lewis et al, 2009), or to overcome risky behaviours (Burlew, Montgomery, Kosinski, & Forcehimes, 2013; Carroll et al., 2013), or to handle complicated a course such as math, or chemistry, or physics, (Abraham, Slate, Saxon, & Barnes, 2014; Ramnarain & Molefe, 2012), or learn a foreign language (Yıldırım, 2012), or to implement special school programs (Perikkou, Kokkinou, Panagiotakos, &

Yannakoulia, 2015) or to succeed at an on line educational program (Kırmızı, 2015; Demir & Horzum, 2013), or to implement conservation initiatives or community programmes (Chilenski, Greenberg, & Feinberg, 2007; Paltzer, Black, & Moberg, 2013; Rault, Vreugdenhil, Jeffrey, & Slinger, 2013; Rosas et al., 2014;), or to be discharged from a hospital (Dalton & Gottlieb, 2003), there is much agreement that readiness in a general way, is precursory to and facilitative of change and success (Weiner, 2009). Unless and until readiness is achieved, nothing happens. Therefore, in the context of this study the question as to what readiness is and how is this experienced by students preparing for the CSEC Exam is an all important one.

Definitions of Readiness

A search for answers to this question has unearthed two glaring truths. First, readiness “means different things to different people” (Dockett & Perry, 2009, p 20). Second, readiness is very difficult to define (Graue, 2006; McDonald & Farrell, 2012). A popular understanding is that readiness is a set of skills and abilities that an individual requires to accomplish a task. Briceno, DeFeyter, and Winster (2013), for example, consider readiness as a “combination of ... competencies in cognitive, language, fine-motor, behavioural, and socio-emotional, skills that are associated with enhanced performance” (Briceno, DeFeyter, & Winster, 2013, p. 433). McDonald and Farrell (2012) considered readiness as a set of abilities that enable the learner to successfully accomplish learning tasks. Graue (2006) noted an overemphasis on readiness as skill-either on its presence or on its deficiency, or on its development. Graue further opined that this understanding of readiness has given rise to a somewhat national and global

preoccupation with readiness checklists to the detriment of other factors that should be factored into the definition or conceptualization of readiness. Halle, Hair, Wandner, and Chien (2012) in their exploration of school readiness for Head Start Children, supported Graue's assertion that while focus on cognitive skills are important, readiness is also contingent upon environmental factors (teacher, classroom and, administration variables).

In exploring the processes involved in organizational change, Weiner (2009), proffered that "readiness is the state of being psychologically and behaviorally ready to take action" (Weiner, 2009, para. 6). Readiness will then result in students feeling confident in their abilities to complete their course work or to think critically or to problem solve (McDonald & Farrell, 2012); or patients/clients feeling motivated to follow through with the actions agreed upon with the therapist (Burlew et al., 2013) or teachers feeling empowered enough to implement the new nutrition program at school (Perikkou et al., 2015). The focus on the psychological processes that underpin readiness is an important addition to the skills and abilities notion that seem to predominate in the literature. Conley and French (2014), in their work on college readiness, have argued that readiness must be regarded as more than skills and abilities, since according to Dockett and Perry (2007) these cannot account for the variances in performance and achievement.

Conley and French (2014), then, offered that readiness is essentially about ownership. In their five-part model of ownership, they have proposed that ownership is a function of psychological processes and attributes such as motivation and engagement, goal orientation and self-direction, self-efficacy and self-confidence, metacognition and

self-monitoring, and persistence (Conley & French, 2014, p.1018). This line of reasoning resonates with McDonald and Farrell (2012), who see attributes such as autonomy, self-discipline, responsibility, and time- management as defining dimensions of readiness; and with Kirmizi (2015) who drew on Bandura's social cognitive theory to frame readiness in terms of self-efficacy and other self-processes.

Still others see readiness as a multidimensional construct (Chilenski et al., 2007; Ionescu & Benga, 2007; McGrettigan & Gray, 2012; Weiner, 2009; Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). While they understand the importance of skills, abilities, and dispositions, they also hold the view that a definition of readiness that focuses on knowledge and abilities is inadequate (Conley & French, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Farran, 2011; Ionescu & Benga, 2007; Stevens, 2013). A definition of readiness, they contend, must, take into consideration the inputs and interplay of a variety of stakeholders and contexts within which the individual is situated, and within which readiness occurs. Graue (2006), makes this a strong case when she argues that cultural realities of privilege and poverty define notions of readiness, and so shape experiences of readiness; and Yamamura et al. (2010), in their study of college readiness within a Latina/o border region, define readiness in the context of political, historical, socio-cultural super systems.

Conceptions of Readiness

From the definitions above, it is seen that readiness is a rather difficult construct to pin down. Notwithstanding, these notions have led to distinct ways readiness is treated not only in research, but also in policy and practice (Graue, 2006).

Readiness as Skills and Abilities

First, there is the pervasive view that readiness is static; that readiness is a state (Ionescu & Benga, 2007). It is something that one has or needs to have to undertake a task or for involvement in an activity. This view, which has permeated much of the early work on readiness, has emanated from concerns about scholastic success and academic achievement (Meisels, 1998). Consequently, readiness has been transformed into measurable attributes or factors, whose presence or absence would indicate the degree of readiness for learning, or readiness for school, or indication of ability to perform a task. As a result, there are numerous psychometric tests that are used in schools and colleges to indicate whether students measure up.

Today, the quest for readiness indicators appears to be even more urgent. This sense of urgency takes shape in a global context where governments are becoming increasingly aware of the need to becoming and staying globally competitive. Strengthening their human capital is regarded as a critical strategy for becoming and staying globally competitive (Graue, 2006; Hickling-Hudson, 2004; Meisels, 1998). Many believe that efforts to find such predictors are linked to the renewed interest in high-stakes testing and standard-based education (Brown, 2010; Graue, 2006; Holme, Richards, Jimerson, & Cohen, 2010). Judson (2007), for instance, has made such an observation and has opined that national education policies, such as the U. S's No Child Left Behind Act with its very ambitious educational targets, have resulted in the use of standardized testing as a means of assessing readiness, and predicting success. Similarly, in the Caribbean, concerns about nation states being

globally competitive have heightened national and regional concerns about students' preparedness for the CSEC Examination.

Readiness as Personal Attribute

The static view of readiness closely aligns to another way in which readiness is conceptualized in the literature. Readiness is seen by many as primarily an individual attribute (Chen, Lee, Parboteeah, Lai, & Chung, 2014; Lau & Shaikh, 2012; Shahrazad et al., 2012). While there has been some shift away from seeing readiness as a function of maturation and developmental milestones, there is still much emphasis on readiness as a function of internal processes. Consequently, there is much in the literature about how conscientiousness (Conley, 2007), self-efficacy, and self-awareness (Krimizi, 2015; Waldman et al, 1999), self-discipline and self-regulations (Holland, 2011; McDonald & Farrell, 2012), ownership of the learning process and motivation (Conley & French, 2009; Oyserman & Destin, 2010), self-perception and identity (Briceno et al., 2013; Oyserman & Destin, 2010) are defining attributes of, or are synonymous with readiness.

Readiness as a Process

Readiness is also conceptualized as a process (Dalton & Gottlieb, 2003). This also contrasts sharply with the notion of readiness as a static construct. Here, readiness is seen as active, dynamic, organic and iterative (Conley & French, 2009; Stevens, 2013; Weiner, 2009). The notion of readiness as a process connotes that readiness has temporal qualities. That readiness is a function of time is supported by readiness models such as the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). The individual clearly works through a series of stages from a point of inaction to action, and sometimes not in a

linear manner. Conley (2007) utilized another model to show how readiness as an iterative process involves several internal processes and extrapersonal factors. Here, there is an appreciation for how internal processes and abilities such as motivation, intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, and problem-solving interplay with external structure and support to create readiness- level of preparation one needs to succeed (Conley, 2007)

Readiness as a Function of Identity

Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012), however explored the issue of readiness as a special process. In an interesting study of urban-schooled Latina/o, they explored how readiness took shape in a social setting and concluded that readiness was essentially a process of identity-formation. In the complex, new world of college, these new college entrants of a different culture must reconstruct their identity to include attributes that are often foreign to their culture. Readiness, then, they contend is a fluid and complex process that requires students to navigate complex relationships and social situations as they construct their identities (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012). In this process, the individual is not simply acted upon, but is also an active agent; readiness is facilitated through self-awareness, conscious reflexivity and perception of their readiness needs (Abel, 2011; Cigdem & Yildirim, 2014; Waldman et al., 1999).

This notion that readiness is a function of the identity process is also shared by Oyserman and Destin (2010). According to their identity-based motivation model (IBM), social context act as primes to activate identities. Social situations are loaded with cues as to how people ought to be and act, and they are often motivated to act in identity-congruent ways (Oyserman & Destin). High school students are in an active stage of

identity formation. Developmental theorists and researchers have stressed the importance of peer relationships in teen development and have shown how their needs for belonging, a sense of normalcy, and support act as important drivers of teen behaviours. Further, the literature has revealed how these needs are particularly powerful drivers of negative and risky/antisocial behaviors (Dumas, Ellis, & Wolfe, 2012; Holland, 2011; McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Peer relationships, then, become a powerful context for the developing teen identity, and according to McDonald and Farrell (2012), the negative is often highlighted in adolescent social setting (p. 233). Perhaps negative is, itself a statement of identity.

High school is a highly emotionally charged environment, a place where teens discover and invent themselves over and over again (Dumas et al., 2012). It is not only an academic space but also a social space and often the line between them is blurred. Unfortunately, in some instances, students find that navigating between these sometimes very different spaces is difficult. They quickly realize that they must choose where to invest most of their time and energy since both may appear mutually exclusive and opposed to each other. This situation often provides the context for identity formation and presents an identity dilemma. Students may find that to appear cool, or to have friends, they are motivated to adopt an identity that does not embrace learning. McDonald and Farrell (2012), contend, that for many students, the school becomes a negative social context that shapes their identities. And as children are motivated to act in “identity-congruent” ways, this will have implications for readiness (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Decisions about studying, course choices and course load, time management, and

the like are identity-driven (Cigdem & Yildirim, 2014; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012; McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Once students incorporate ideas that do not support learning into their identity, then, they are less likely to engage in activities or avail themselves of opportunities that will ready them for the CSEC Exam. Identity then becomes an important moderator for students' readiness experiences (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012).

Notwithstanding this, McDonald and Farrell (2012) noted that peer relationships can also be a powerful context for students' academic experiences. In looking at readiness in the context of Early College High School (ECHS), they noted how peer relationships became important learning communities. Here, students "felt more comfortable in their own school skin" (McDonald & Farrell, 2012, p.233), obtained support for their successes, and were held accountable for expected standards. In these learning communities, students felt cared for, respected as learners, safe, and resourceful, and so are more receptive in the learning process. Additionally, the social recognition and affirmation that they experienced provided strong support for identity formation (Holland, 2011; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Schaefer, 2014), which in turn impacted their readiness (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012). Students' identity, how they see themselves as learners, then impacts how well they do at school.

Readiness as a product of a collective: Readiness is not only conceptualized as a process at the intrapersonal level, but also as a process and the product of collective effort.

Theories such as the family investment and family stress model (Iruka et al., 2012; Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2014), Community learning model (Leonard, 2013), community

cultural wealth model (Yamamura et al., 2010), cultural capital theory and systems coherence alignment theory (Abraham et al., 2014), all underscore the role of a variety of stakeholders in readying or preparing children for a number of situations.

There is consensus that families provide the first and richest experiences to support readiness (Graue, 2006; Leonard, 2013; McGettigan & Gray, 2012). Families provide a range of support for readiness. These include providing guidance and a nurturing environment, values and resources, promoting learning, advocating for children (Briceno et al., 2013; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Gomez-Arizaga and Conejeros-Solar, 2014; Graue, 2006; McGettigan & Gray, 2012). Families also provide children with experiences so that they to develop important life skills so that they can navigate the world outside the home. Parenting styles and parental education were also found to important determinants of school readiness. Authoritative and supportive parenting styles were found to be more impactful on readiness than active parent presence in school activities, (Kramer, 2012; Leonard, 2013); and parental education, (Briceno et al., 2013; Jeon et al., 2014), but particularly maternal education (Graue, 2006; Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010) was a significant predictor of school readiness. It is also important to note here that with respect to teens, Gomez-Arizaga and Conejeros- Solar (2014) contend that it is important for parents to provide support without appearing over-controlling. This view aligns well with what we know about the need for autonomy in adolescent development.

From the literature, it is also clear that families and parents can, in very profound ways, undermine and jeopardize readiness in children. Poor parenting, parental mental

health, family violence and instability, and poverty can prevent children from gaining the skills, competencies, and attitudes they need to be ready for school or ready to learn (Briceno et al., 2013; Graue, 2006; Iruka et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2014; McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005; Miller et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). These very skills, competencies, and attitudes are critical resources that students need to successfully sit an exam as the CSEC.

There are also growing discussions on the role of the school in readying students (Ionescu & Benga, 2007; McAllister et al., 2005; Meisels, 1998). According to Graue (2006), since “readiness is at its core a relational concept” (Graue, 2006, p. 28), any conceptualization of readiness, of necessity must include the ‘ready school’. Given the importance of the school in the readying process, Graue further asserts that schools have an ethical responsibility to be ready for students. This responsibility behooves schools to pay attention to pedagogic, leadership and administrative, and school cultural factors. Further, teacher training, parental support and their involvement school activities, community-school partnerships, and student discipline and support practices, are critical inputs for school readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 2006; McDonald & Farrell, 2012). This responsiveness, in addition to creating an enabling environment for students’ readiness, also influences students’ perception of their readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009).

Neither the child, nor the family, nor the school exists in isolation, and so an important consideration in any discussion of readiness must be the role of the community within which these exist (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2009; McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Just as the family does, the Community offers a range of

support for readiness. These include a sense of cultural heritage, and grounding (Piert, 2007; Yamamura et al., 2010), resources, stability, and support for learning and achievement (McAllister et al., 2005; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Schaefer & Rivera, 2012; Yamamura et al., 2010). Economic and political stability contribute significantly to community wellbeing. As such, policymakers, have a key role in facilitating the economic, political and social changes need to support readiness (Holme et al., 2010; McGettigan & Gray, 2012; Meisels, 1998; Strayhorn, 2014; Yamamura et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2012). It is noted, however, that many communities do not provide the environment to support readiness as they struggle with high incidence of crime, poverty, social apathy; and many children find themselves amongst the marginalized, oppressed, and exploited

Social-Ecological Perspective: Integrating Conceptions of Readiness

The social-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1998; 2005) provides an excellent framework for integrating the various conceptions and theories of readiness. Notions of readiness as skills, abilities, and dispositions, as a dynamic process, and as a collective responsibility, as well as the basic tenets of theories such as learning community model, investment and family stress, social capital, and community wealth models are all captured by the socio-ecological model. Bronfenbrenner's thesis is that an individual operates in a social context and that the dynamic interaction between the individual and this social context is of utmost importance in the development of the individual. The tools of this model will help to elucidate how elements at and between the various levels contribute to students experience of readiness for the CSEC Exam

The socio-ecological model then, provides the conceptual framework for this phenomenological study. At this point, attention is drawn to the ongoing discussion on the role and use of theory in phenomenological research given the approach's exploratory and dynamic nature. The concern relative to this type of research is whether the researcher's commitment to or association with a theoretical camp would compromise the phenomenological exploration process or whether exposure to theoretical ideas would prevent the researcher from discovering the "universal essence" of the phenomenon. Different understandings as to how to arrive at this 'universal essence' has led to two distinct schools of phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology privileges the researcher as the interpreter of meanings. Transcendental or psychological phenomenology focuses less on the interpretative role of the researcher. Instead, this brand of phenomenology values the concept of bracketing as a way of keeping the researcher's theoretical orientation from shadowing the authentic experiences of the participants. The focus is on describing the experience rather than in interpreting the experience. Creswell (1994) noted the flexibility of phenomenology that allows on one hand "no preconceived notions, frameworks or expectations guide researchers," or a theory to provide basis for comparison with other theories on the other (p. 94). The phenomenological approach, clearly constructivist by nature, allows for the exploration of students experience of readiness.

Through the phenomenological approach then, I explored students' experience of readiness for the national school leaving examination, the CSEC. This study is set loosely within the theoretical discourse with the social-ecological perspective providing the lens

that guided the research process. Mindful that the qualitative approach privileges constructivist paradigm, I appreciate that theories may provide some general structure or guide; however, I also know that the process is to be flexible enough to allow for the emergence of new insights and greater understanding, even beyond the guiding theory or conceptual framework of the study.

The social-ecological model seems quite suited for phenomenological exploration given how it allows for fluid and unencumbered movement within and between the various elements or spheres of influence. According to this model, the student exists in an environment of nested spheres in a way that they contribute individually and collectively to the development and the experiences of the student. The child who is at the epicenter exists in the context of the family, peer relationships, and the school, which exists within the community, which exists within the greater social, cultural, economic and political context. These supersystems are impacted by regional and global realities. The model then illuminates the symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between the learner and the environment, the environment acting on the child, and the child acting on the environment through processes of negotiation and adjustment (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012).

Given this framework, readiness can be viewed as a function of interlocking systems of relationships, structures, role, support, values, expectations, resources and policies. The family provides the most essential and most basic context for readiness (Graue, 2006). According to Bronfenbrenner (1989) proximal processes, such as those in the parent-child relationship, provide a primary mechanism for development. As the child

grows, interactions within wider circles take on more prominence and so become powerful forces in shaping experiences and development, particularly during adolescence. Yamamura et al. (2010) also assert that readiness must be conceptualized in terms of the impact of larger macro systems on the individual. Historical, social, cultural, and political systems inadvertently affect things such as budgetary allocations, resource distribution, and accessibility and these in turn have significant implications for living realities of children as well as on learning outcomes or student achievement. Further, at a higher level, it is seen how national realities are influenced or dictated by regional and global political and economic agendas (Blom & Hobbs, 2007; Gomez-Arizaga & Conejeros-Solar, 2014; McGettigan & Gray, 2012). For globalization impacts the domestic economy which will in turn determine the ability of families, communities, and education authorities to respond to the education needs of students (UNICEF, 2012). Hence, even global realities have significant implications for student readiness.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of layers and processes, readiness is a positive experience or state that is supportive of learning and transmission of skills and values. Dobinson-Harrington (2006), in exploring the tutor-tutee relationship and the processes involved in the transference of skills, discussed readiness in the context of supportive encounters. These supportive encounters may be experienced at the level of family and peer networks and at the levels of the school environment, the community, and the wider society.

As Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012) showed, it is what happens within these encounters that is critical to readiness. They noted that as students navigate

complex relationships and social situations in these interlocking spheres, they construct identities that include perceptions of their capabilities, interests, and limitations. Here the individual is an active, purposeful agent, not a passive one. Readiness is assessed through self-awareness, conscious reflexivity, and perception of one's own readiness needs (Abel, 2011; Cigdem & Yildirim, 2014; Kungu, Machtmepe, Prieto, & Jabor, 2012; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Waldman et al., 1999). Readiness is also assessed through perceptions that the learner has about whether the environment is supportive, whether resources are available, and whether procedures are in place to support their effort (Holland, 2012). These processes, relationships, roles, values, interactions, and expectations in the social environment shape readiness experience (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 2005). So, readiness is the extent to which one is willing to enter and participate, such that knowledge and skills are transferred and acquired (Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000). Simultaneously it is the process of getting one prepared to move (Leonard, 2009; Waldman et al., 1999). This process ends with the individuals arriving at a place where they can undertake an event, or pursue an activity, or acquire skills, or sit the CSEC Exam.

Readiness is also an outcome. It is what follows from actions taken by intentional others within these interlocking spheres as well as what appears to be the result of psychological, existential experiences as one navigates the social space. The outcome can be a set of skills, and competencies as indicated by McGettigan and Gray (2012), or a set of values and attitudes that signal transition to the next stage, or the threshold to the next level (Pierr, 2007), or an element of personality/identity (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-

Jiménez, 2012). Outcomes can also be processes, relationships, roles, values, interactions, and expectations, in the social environment that shape readiness experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989; 2005). In the context of this research, readiness is an outcome of the processes and inputs aforementioned. It is also seen as foundation on which success on the CSEC examination rests.

Gaps in the Literature

Readiness is clearly a significant and fundamental psychological construct, and the research footprint clearly bears this out. The literature is replete with studies on readiness in a variety of contexts. However, there is very little research with respect to readiness for an exam or test taking. In fact, nowhere in the literature is this sufficiently addressed. Further, there is nothing in the literature about readiness in the context of the CSEC Examination, a regional exam taken by Caribbean students. This lack of research about students' readiness to sit the CSEC Exam represents a significant gap. This study was intended to fill that gap. Another gap identified, and one highlighted by Robotham (2008), and supported by Entwistle and Ramsden (2013) is the failure of quantitative research to comprehensively shed light on the issues that impact high school students from the perspective of the students themselves. McDonald and Farrell (2012) contend that "student "voice" in research can yield significant information" (p. 217). This research aims to address that void. Students explored and shared their experiences of readiness in relation to a high stakes and life defining exam. This study then, represents their voices in the scholarly discourse on the issue of readiness.

Theory-Approach-Method Alignment

For this study, I adopted an interpretivist paradigm. The premise is that reality as we perceive knowing it is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially. In keeping with this ontology, the study adopts the qualitative approach, which Creswell (2013) stated is suited for exploring subjective reality and meaning. Further, the qualitative approach is warranted when building new knowledge and theories, for understanding the complexities of the human experience. Students' 'experiences of readiness' is conceived to be a multidimensional construct, involving complex processes, and operating simultaneously at different levels. It, therefore, begs exploration through the exploratory methods associated with the qualitative approach. Further, there is a tacit recognition by some researchers that qualitative approaches can shed light into the complex world of the secondary school student (Robotham, 2008). Also, the assertion by McDonald and Farrell (2012) that student voice in research would yield significant information further strengthens the case for the Phenomenological approach as the method of inquiry for this research project.

The phenomenological approach has been chosen for this qualitative inquiry. Phenomenology explores shared meanings. Its goal is to “reduce” individuals’ experiences about a certain phenomenon so that the description of the universal essence is derived (VanManen, 1990, p. 177). Phenomenology is most appropriate for this research topic because it allows for an understanding of students’ experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC examination, as well as to derive a description of

the very essence (Creswell, 2013) of this experience of readiness for the CSEC Examination.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experience of readiness for Antigua and Barbudan students as they prepared for the CSEC Examination. As reviewed in the previous chapter, students' *experiences of readiness* were conceived as a multidimensional construct involving complex processes, operating simultaneously at different levels. It is broadly conceived as the extent to which individuals are prepared to enter and participate in any undertaking (Holton Bates, & Ruona, 2000). There is also much agreement that qualitative approach allows for the kind of in-depth probing that would shed light on this phenomenon. This chapter presents a map of the research topography. It outlines (a) research design and rationale, (b) role of the researcher, (c) methodology, and (d) issues of trustworthiness, (e) limitations, (f) ethical issues, and (g) significance. Finally, I close the chapter with a summary that bridges to Chapter 4

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are Antiguan and Barbudan students' experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC examination?

Research Question 1 Subquestions:

1. What does it mean to students to be ready for the CSEC Exam?
2. What are some key readiness issues as students prepare for the CSEC Exam?
3. What readiness activities do students participate in leading up to the CSEC Exam?

4. What is the meaning of readiness for students as they reflect on their preparation for the CSEC Exam?

Research Question 2. How do students experience support as they prepare for the CSEC Exam?

Research Question 2 Subquestions

5. What are the supports that contribute to the experience of readiness?
6. What “supports” are experienced as counterproductive?

Research Design

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm. It aligns with the philosophical orientation that holds that reality as we know is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially. In keeping with this ontology, the research took a qualitative approach, which according to Creswell (2013), is suited for exploring subjective reality and meaning. As noted by research methodologists, the qualitative approach is warranted when building new knowledge and theories and for understanding the complexities of the human experience. As established by the literature review, students’ experiences of readiness are a multidimensional construct, involving complex processes, and operating simultaneously at different levels. It therefore begs exploration through the in-depth methods associated with the qualitative approach. Further to, there is also a tacit recognition by some researchers that qualitative approaches can shed light into complex world of the secondary school student, given that many quantitative approaches fail to do so sufficiently (Robotham, 2008).

The phenomenological approach seemed the most appropriate choice for this qualitative inquiry. Phenomenology is concerned with describing the phenomenon of interest as experienced several individuals. Its goal is to “reduce” the experience individuals have about a certain phenomenon so that finally the description of the universal essence is created, which means “to grasp the very nature of the thing” (VanManen, 1990, p. 177). Phenomenology allowed for the exploration of students’ experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC Examination. This exploration derived a description of the very essence of this experience of readiness vis-à-vis the CSEC Examination.

Another approach that might have proved useful for this inquiry is the narrative. Narrative approach, grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, “involves the gathering of narratives—written, oral, visual—focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide “insight that (befits) the complexity of human lives” (Josselson, 2006, p.4). Narratives tend to derive “living theories”-explanations by individuals of their experiences relative to a social phenomenon. In contrast, phenomenology focuses on lived experiences to derive the very essence of the thing. The unit of focus for the narrative and phenomenology tends to be different: the individual and the phenomenon respectively.

Yet another possible approach, could have been the case study. Like phenomenology, this is grounded within an interpretivist, constructivist ontology. The case study involves “study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p.74). The case study would have been an appropriate

approach if this research sought to explore the concept of readiness within the context of one school or two schools, if it was believed that the disparate school environments lead to different readiness experiences.

The research questions highly favoured a phenomenological approach, since they sought to understand the phenomenon of readiness through exploring the lived experiences of students. The phenomenological approach, interpretivist /constructivist by nature, allowed for an exploration of the phenomenon of readiness within the context of the socio-ecological model.

Role of the Researcher

Phenomenology is about the exploration of subjective understanding of a phenomenon. Van Manen (1997) described it as “distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational...” (p.345). This, therefore, necessitates that the researcher is intimately involved in exploration of the phenomenon. According to Dahlberg (2006), openness permits the researcher to listen, see, and understand; it demonstrates respect, and a certain level of humility toward the phenomenon. This openness needs to be maintained throughout the entire research process as it allows the researcher to move back and forth within the research design in an iterative manner (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). In this frame, constant self-reflection results in the researchers’ heightened awareness of their values, biases, and assumptions relating to both the phenomenon and the participants. I used bracketing as a strategy, known in phenomenological research to keep values and biases from influencing the research process (Patton, 2002). Bracketing was achieved through by journaling and memoing (Tufford, 2012). Additionally, these

strategies, along with member checking, were used to ensure trustworthiness of the findings.

Methodology

Population

In Antigua and Barbuda, students enter secondary school around age 12 years and upon reaching Form 5, they are expected to take the school leaving exam, the CSEC Exam. A student who progresses steadily through secondary school would take five years. However, there are many who may take longer. Annually, over 2,000 students take this exam at the June sitting. The June sitting culminates their secondary education, with students registered en block for the CSEC Exam according to the school attended. The CSEC Exam is again offered in January (Ministry of Education, 2015). This sitting attracts students who want to take an early try at the Exam and out-of-school-individuals who want to increase their number of CSEC passes in an attempt increase their marketability or employability (Stewart, 2015). For the January sitting, registrants take the exams under their own banner.

The population for this study comprised all students who sat the June administration of the 2017 CSEC Exam. These students were dispersed across different school types, geographic areas, and socio-economic groupings, and were of the same age group (16-18yrs). Through this study, my intent was to explore and describe the lived experiences of students as they readied themselves for the June 2017 sitting of the CSEC Exam.

Sampling and Sample

I selected the sample through purposeful sampling. This strategy, according to Patton (2002), allows for the selection of “information-rich cases for study in-depth...information rich cases yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230). Specifically, I used the maximum or heterogeneity variation sampling. Here, the goal was to capture the entire range of variation that exists relative to the phenomenon or sample universe (Patton, 2002). This sampling method is valued for analyzing both uniqueness as well as shared patterns that have evolved out of the diversity of the cases.

Students were purposefully selected using geographic area, school type, and gender as inclusion criteria. The sample, chosen for both practical and theoretical/empirical reasons, comprised 12 students (Patton, 2001). This population tends to be transient. Having completed secondary school, many students leave the country to pursue personal goals, which include pursuing higher education (Stewart, 2015). Purposeful sampling seemed most practical since accessibility and availability presented a challenging. Further, Creswell (2013), drawing from empirical evidence, contend that qualitative research can tolerate much variability in size (he cited studies with samples ranging from 1 to 325 for phenomenological inquiry). Patton (2002) agreed that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry (p. 244). However, he advises that the decisions about sample size should take into consideration factors such as the research question, the purpose of the research, credibility issues, available resources, and time constraints.

The sample of 12 students was selected as follows: two students -one male and one female- from single-sex private school; two students -one male and one female- from single-sex public school; four students from coed public school; and four students from coed private school. Further, in keeping with the maximum variation principle, two of the eight students from coed schools came from rural schools, since all the single sex schools were in the urban area. Finally, Patton (2002) recommended a minimum sample for qualitative research. Concerned about coverage, however, he holds that the researcher may add to the sample as the data collection process unfolds. The sample size, then, remained open, given that the goal of qualitative sampling is data saturation or data redundancy (Patton, 2002).

I selected the 12 participants, unknown to me, from the 2017 list of CSEC registrants of the June sitting, which was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Science and Technology. I contacted the participants via their secondary schools and via a formal letter, (to them and their parents if under 18 years) inviting them to participate in the research. A follow up telephone call pursued confirmations. Upon declaration of interest to take part in the study, I began the informed consent process, which included the signing of the informed consent document, and parental consent and assent document (for students below 18 years). The informed consent process is to ensure the safety of participants and as such the information that was provided included: (a) the purpose of the research, (b) the procedures of the research, (c) risk and benefits of the research, (d) the voluntary nature of research participation, (e) the participants' right to stop the research at any time, and (f) the procedures used to protect confidentiality.

Instrumentation

The interview schedule that I developed was the primary instrument for this study. The interview schedule comprised nine sets of questions which allowed the interviews to be done in a semi-structured way. Given the complexity of the phenomenon, as well as the scope for exploration afforded by the social-ecological model, the interview questions gathered data from all level of the social ecological system. Questions explored dynamics at the personal level; they also allowed for an exploration and hence understanding of the systemic/environmental forces at play with respect to the research phenomenon. An example of a question that sought an understanding of the phenomenon at the personal level is “Can you recall what it felt like getting ready for the CSEC?” An example of a question that sought an exploration of environmental forces that impact the phenomenon of interest is “As you think about yourself getting ready for the CSEC, what were some factors that supported, or helped your readiness for the CSEC?”

Content validity is very important as it ensures that the questions for the inquiry will elicit the data necessary to answer the research questions. In establishing content validity for this study, I drew on the expertise of colleague students here at Walden. I discussed with them the phenomenon under study and then shared with them the interview protocol. They then evaluated the appropriateness of the questions based on our shared understanding of the phenomenon under study. Their feedback allowed me to finetune the interview protocol.

Data Collection Process

Phenomenology dictates an active, emotive, dynamic, and iterative methodology. It prescribes that the researcher is open and willing to be led by the process, moving back and forth between the various elements, and as such the research process is somewhat organic. The data-gathering tools captured the rich textual data from individuals who have experience with the phenomenon of interest. These tools, developed by the researcher, included (a) semi-structured interview, and (b) reflexive journal. The semi-structured interview, the primary data gathering tool, was conducted as soon as it was possible after students wrote the Exam. Each Interview, guided by an interview schedule/protocol, lasted approximately one hour. Since securing space in the participants' schools was unsuccessful, the interviews took place in the reading /quiet room of the Public Library. The room was reserved for the interview to ensure privacy and anonymity. The interview questions were intended to draw from the participants their feelings, perceptions, and experiences related to their preparation for the CSEC so that the essence of the phenomenon can be derived. Additionally, questions sought to obtain data to elucidate the social-ecological forces that shaped students' experiences of readiness.

At the end of the interviews, I thanked the participants and I also provided them with information relating to post-interview follow-up. Specifically, they were informed of the member checking process and their role in helping to establish trustworthiness of the findings. Then, we agreed on procedures for post-interview follow-up.

Bracketing was an important strategy used during the data gathering process. In the first instance, participants were instructed to focus on what is going on the inside and describe their “lived experience in a language as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 13). Secondly, as expressed by Groenewald, I bracketed my own “preconceptions and enter(ed) the individual’s lifeworld and use(d) the self as an experiencing interpreter” (2004, p. 13). The interview then became an interchange between participants and I as we collaborated to unfold the essence of the phenomenon of readiness.

The reflective journal was another data gathering tool (Groenewald, 2004) that I used for this study. The journal not only allowed me to record my observations, feelings, and thoughts, but it also allowed me to reflect on these during the data gathering process. The reflective journal then served to optimize my efficiency as research instrument.

Data quality and trustworthiness of findings were accomplished through strategies such as member checking. Participants were contacted about one to three weeks after the interview, based on what was agreed post-interview. Participants were given the script from the interviews and were given the chance to make and necessary corrections, or even to add more detail. This upgraded data set became the official data for the study and was now ready for coding.

Data Treatment and Storage

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. Each interview was recorded on a separate tape and assigned a special code. An example of the coding system that I used is “Student 1, Dec. 12, 2017”. Within 24 hours of the interview, I

listened to the recordings and transcribed the interview. These transcripts were similarly coded. During this process, I made special note of key words, and phrases that strongly speak to their experience; these I intend share in the dissertation to enter the participants' voice into the scholarly dialogue.

According to research protocol, data are to be stored for at least five years. Data from this research that are stored include the interview recording, the transcripts of the recordings, the reflective journal and field notes. These are protected either through password protection for electronic files or by physically locking the away paper documents in a file cabinet. Data protection does not only protect the anonymity of participants, but it also ensures that the data stored remains protected for the required five years.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis (used guardedly, as advised by Groenewald, 2004) involves the combing of textual data for patterns and themes and determining how these patterns and themes answer the research questions under consideration. According to Taylor and Gibbs (2010), this is an iterative, cyclical, progressive, and organic process, quite unlike the linear process of quantitative research. Groenewald (2004) further assert that this is a “way of transforming the data through interpretation”. Generally, qualitative analysis takes place on two levels: At the first level, the data are classified, summarized, and analysed, and at the second level the analysis is embedded in the specific qualitative design (Creswell, 2013). For the phenomenological study, as this one is, the researcher

analysed rich textual data to derive what Creswell (2013) refers to as “essence description”.

For the study, data analysis was accomplished through content analysis and framework analysis. Content analysis involves the categorization of textual data. Here, the raw data was organized through process involving classifying, summarising, and tabulating the data. Framework analysis is where the data are looked at through the theoretical lens. For this study, this involved activities such as transcribing the data, identifying a thematic framework using a priori (based on the literature) and emerging themes, coding, charting, and mapping, and interpreting the themes (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). The social ecological model loosely provided the framework for data analysis of this study. As the researcher, however, I was cognizant that new themes could have emerged, and so analysis was done deductively as well as inductively (Creswell, 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is critical to establishing the worth of qualitative research. They hold that trustworthiness encompasses (a) credibility, the degree of truth in the findings, (b) transferability, the extent to which the findings are applicable in other contexts, (c) dependability, the extent to which the findings are replicable, and (d) confirmability, the extent to which the findings are of the participants responses. Strategies that I used to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings include bracketing, the reflective journal, member checking, and thick rich description.

Bracketing

Bracketing is intended to erect a shield around the phenomenon such that outside forces do not interfere with its discernment. For this study, I bracketed myself during stages of data collection, and analysis so as not to impose myself on the explication of phenomenon. Bracketing expressly contributed to the credibility and the confirmability of the findings.

Reflective Journal

The reflective journal (Groenewald, 2004), while it is a good data analysis tool, it is also a good tool for ensuring trustworthiness. It allowed me to reflect on my actions throughout the research process as well as to be mindful of my cognitions as I work with the data. As such reflexivity contributes to the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Member Checking

Member checking involves seeking validation of data from individuals who originally provided them. Participants viewed field notes right after the interviews and later they received a copy of their interview transcripts. This provided them the opportunity to validate the data as reflecting their perspectives relating to the phenomenon under study. Member checking established credibility and truthfulness (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Thick Rich Descriptions

Thick rich descriptions refer to the comprehensive and detailed description of the phenomenon such that one can evaluate its usefulness in other situations or contexts (Creswell, 20013). The quality and detailed interviewing, the reflexive journal and field

notes contributed to thick rich description in this study and so ensures the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

Other strategies that I used to ensure trustworthiness include my careful attention to detail in describing the research procedures, and audit trail to allow for replication of the study, as well as maximum variation sampling that takes into consideration the diversity that exists in the population. It is however important to bear in mind Lincoln and Guba's (1985) contention that for qualitative research trustworthiness may never be totally achieved, given the constructivist notion of how knowledge is constructed.

Limitations

The study relied on self-reports and on participants' recollection of an experience they had some time prior to the interview. A major limitation therefore was the study's reliance on memory. Additionally, hindsight bias and self-serving bias could have affected how students recalled their experiences.

Ethical Issues

The researcher, cognizant of the obligation to safeguard the interest and wellbeing of the participants, conducted the research in strict adherence to the ethical standards as established by APA. Participants were provided with information that allowed them to make an informed decision as to whether to take part in the study. Special care was taken in respect of participants who were under 18 years (parental informed consent and participant assent). Additionally, special note was taken of the social position of the researcher and as such efforts were made to ensure that participants do not know me. Measures were taken to diminish the impact social desirability and researcher effects on

research quality. In the first instance, this was accomplished by paying attention to the interview space and researcher presence. Other measures included a robust informed consent process, rigorous and sensitive data collection process, and management of data.

Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical significance and local significance. Theoretically, it seeks to extend the literature by shedding light on the subjective experience of readiness. Specifically, it seeks to illuminate Antigua and Barbudan students' experience of readiness as they prepare for a life-defining examination, the CSEC Exam. The local significance comes from the fact that the research seeks to shed light on a phenomenon of cultural relevance in relation to a population that is under-researched, in a socio-cultural context that has eluded mainstream research. The findings of this study will provide insights into the dynamics and processes involved in students' exam preparation leading up to their negotiation of the CSEC Exam. Consequently, they will have direct impact on both policy and practice with respect to the provision of support students need as they prepare for the CSEC Exam, thereby maximizing their chances of doing well on the Exam.

Summary

In this phenomenological study, I described students' experience of readiness as they prepared for the CSEC Exam. In keeping with the constructivist tradition, I employed tools such as the semi-structured interview and the reflective journal to draw from the 12 participants the rich textual data. This data then became the subject of

analysis in Chapter 4. Here, through content analysis and framework analysis, the thick description of the phenomenon will be derived.

Chapter 4: Results

This phenomenological study explores and describes the experience of readiness for Antiguan and Barbudan students as they prepared for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Exam, the CSEC. As already established, students' 'experiences of readiness' is conceived to be a multidimensional construct, involving complex processes, operating simultaneously at different levels, and so the research questions were geared to capture the interplay of readiness factors at and between the different levels. Question 1. explored factors at the individual level while Question 2 explored factors at the other levels. The questions however allowed for the flexibility required to explore of the interplay of the various factors at the various levels.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are Antiguan and Barbudan students' experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC examination?

Research Question 1 Subquestions:

1. What does it mean to students to be ready for the CSEC Exam?
2. What are some key readiness issues as students prepare for the CSEC Exam?
3. What readiness activities do students participate in leading up to the CSEC Exam?
4. What is the meaning of readiness for students as they reflect on their preparation for the CSEC Exam?

Research Question 2: How do students experience support as they prepare?

Research Question 2 Subquestions:

5. What are the supports that contribute to the experience of readiness?
6. What supports are experienced as counterproductive?

Chapter 4 then, is the presentation of the results and the analysis of the data collected during the data collection process. It presents interview questions and describes the phenomenological interview as a special tool for the exploration of lived experiences. In this chapter, I (a) describe the setting, (b) provide demographical information about the participants, (c) describe the data gathering process (d) describe the phenomenological process and the interview, (e) describe the role of the researcher; (f) present the data as per research questions, (g) describe the data analysis process, and (h) present the findings through thematic analysis of the data. The chapter ends with a summary that bridges to Chapter 5.

Setting

Antigua and Barbuda is a small island developing nation with a fledgling and fragile economy. Being a tourism-based economy, the country boasts of its sandy beaches, but the real and only natural resource is its people. As such the development of its human capital is critical to both its development and its sustainability. Consequently, preparing its youth to contribute to the economy is a development imperative. Secondary education and the eventual sitting of the CSEC Exam serve to tool and certify young people to participate in the economic activities of the country.

The CSEC Exam then, holds much national importance. The cultural pressure that attends the Exam speaks not only to its importance to the country, but also to its power to

impact the lives of students and their families. Even months after writing the Exam, many of participants still recalled with much trepidation, or relief, their experiences leading up to it.

Awareness of this cultural pressure and a sensitivity to its hold on students, resulted in the choice of venue for the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in a secluded reading room of the Antigua and Barbuda Public Library. After permission was sought from the Director of the National Library Service, the interviews were scheduled with the participants' input. Access to the room was easy as the personnel responsible for the room was appropriately apprised and they made the necessary provision for it to be vacant for the scheduled interviews. The room consisted mainly of a conference table with chairs and a fan; and during the interviews, a tape recorder/cellular phone was used. Each participant and I were the only occupants in the room while we participated in the phenomenological interview that lasted approximately one hour. The interviews took place over a four-week period spanning November and December 2017.

Demographics

The population for this study comprised students who sat the 2017 June sitting of the CSEC Exam as registrants of both public and private secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. Twelve participants were chosen through purposeful sampling since according to according to Patton (2002), this allows for the selection of “information-rich cases for [in depth] study (and) ...information rich cases yield insights and in-depth understanding” (p. 230). The 12 participants were chosen in such a way as to capture the entire range of variation that exists relative to the phenomenon or sample universe

(Patton, 2002). As such, the sample presented a mix of public and private schools as well as single sex and co-ed school: two students -one male and one female- from single-sex private school; two students -one male and one female- from single-sex public school; four students from co-ed public school; and four students from co-ed private school. Further, in keeping with the maximum variation principle, two of the eight students from coed schools will come from rural schools, since all the single sex schools are in the urban area.

Of the 12 participants, six were females and six were males. All of them except for one male and one female who were 18years, were between 16 and 17 years.

Data Collection

The goal of this study was to capture the essence of the readiness experience of students as they prepared for the CSEC Exam. This field work took place after students prepared for and sat the Exam and so students were required to depend on their memory of their readiness experience to provide the data. Twelve participants were purposively chosen since participants were required to have knowledge of the phenomenon of interest. The schools list of 2017 CSEC registrants was obtained from the Ministry of Education, and schools were selected as follows according the maximum variation principle: two single-sex private school; two single-sex public school; four co-ed public school; four co-ed private school. Five students from each of the 12 schools were randomly selected from the schools list, accounting for a total of 60 students. The selected schools were contacted, and permission sought for the release of contact information for these five students. Then, one of these five students, was finally selected,

and the parents contacted via telephone. Following a brief introduction of myself and the study, I extended an invitation for the student to be part of the study. One student subsequently declined, and I selected another student from the remaining four students from that school. In the end, 12 participants from 12 schools took part in the study as follows: two participants, one male and one female, were chosen from two single-sex private schools; two participants, one male and one female, were chosen from two single-sex public schools; four participants were chosen from four co-ed public schools; and four participants were chosen from four co-ed private schools. In keeping with the maximum variation principle, two of the eight participants from coed schools were chosen from rural schools, since all the single sex schools were urban schools.

The informed consent process took place in two stages: An initial stage took place over the phone. Here, I introduced myself to the parent and explained the purpose of the call. Once the parent and the participant agreed to be part of the study, a time is agreed for the conduct of the interview. The final informed consent took place at the interview site. Here, participants were given the informed consent /assent form and together we went through the terms of engagement, affording the participants the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification. The process ended with the participants affixing their signatures to the informed consent document (Appendices B; C; D) with the understanding that participation is voluntary, that anonymity and confidentiality are assured, that the information they provided will be secured, and that the interview will be audio taped.

At the research site, measures were put in place to ensure that the interview room was comfortable. Participants were greeted upon entering and thanked for showing up for the interview. The interview commenced after the formalities of the informed consent process. The interview started after the audio recording device was switched on and notes were taken for the duration of interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Nine questions comprised the interview protocol. These provided a loose structure that afforded the participant and I the flexibility to move around in the interview to unearth the factors operating in this very complex and multifaceted psychological phenomenon.

The questions follow:

Q1. Would you consider the sitting of the CSEC Exams an important undertaking?

Could you please share why you said that?

Do you think it's important for one to be ready to sit the Exam?

Q2. How ready do you think you were for the exam? Why do you say that?

Q3. Tell me about your experience preparing for the CSEC?

Remember that experience. What was that experience like for you?

Can you describe it? How did it feel? What were some thoughts you had about you being ready? What were some feelings you had? (feelings of being cared for, being respected, being safe and resourceful?).

Can you capture the difference between ready and not ready? What were some things that indicated to you that you were ready? What were some

things that indicated to you that you were not ready? So, then what do you see as the critical difference between “being ready” and “being not ready”

Q4. What were some things you did to be ready?

What was the most significant thing? The least significant thing?

Q5. As you think about this experience, what were some factors that supported, or determined, or helped your readiness?

Q6. What was the most significant factor in helping you to reach this state of readiness?

Could you please explain why you consider this to be the most significant?

Q7. What might you consider to be some readiness challenges or concerns you had as you prepared for the CSEC?

Q8. Do you think that your readiness is important for how well you did or did not do on the CSEC?

Q9. What suggestions do you have for increasing readiness experiences for others contemplating the same undertaking?

What specific advice would you give to students preparing for the CSEC Exam?

In conclusion, what is the most important thing you want us to take away from this interview?

The audio recordings were transcribed shortly after the interviews. These notes were then emailed to the interviewees as part of the validation, member checking process.

This gave participants the opportunity to see the content of the interview as well as to share additional insights.

The Phenomenological Process and the Interview

The phenomenological approach was chosen for this qualitative inquiry.

Phenomenology explores shared meanings. In the context of this study, it explored students' shared experience of readiness for the CSEC Exam. The goal is to "reduce" their experiences of readiness for the CSEC Exam so that the description of the universal essence is derived (VanManen, 1990, p. 177). According to Streubert and Carpenter (2011):

Phenomenology moves between the description of the phenomenon to our understanding of it. Its fundamental intention is to access the consciousness of the individual and grasp what this consciousness can reveal regarding the phenomena that it has experienced. Hence, phenomenology is at the same time the science of phenomena and a method to delve into the experiences of a person in the way that the/she have lived, experienced, and created meaning relative to the phenomenon.

Given this therefore, the phenomenological interview is necessarily two tiered. At one level it seeks to obtain descriptions and at another level it explores meanings.

The phenomenological interview, then, is an existential interchange between the researcher and the research participant in a way that allows for an understanding from the perspective of the participant. The researcher/interviewer must never lose sight of the fact that it is the interviewee's experience and the meaning that he/she attaches to it that is under study. As such, the researcher/interviewer must always be aware of her own

thoughts and feelings so that they do not shape the explored experiences. To this end therefore, I used the reflective journal and bracketing to keep me separate from the interviewee and the phenomenon.

That the “researcher is instrument” is critical to the phenomenological interview. This behooves the researcher/interviewer to listen to, to capture, and to coexist with the phenomenon. The interviewee, having had experience with the phenomenon, have codified it, and so now it has a special meaning to him or her. During the interview then, the phenomenon will be revealed through what the interviewee shared via speech. Therefore, what is obtained during the interview via speech has phenomenological value to the interviewer (Bevan, 2014).

Cognizant of the nature of the phenomenological interview and the role of the interviewer in the exploration process, then, I paid careful attention to the ambience of the interview room as well as to my attire and to my demeanor. Advance preparation of the room ensured that the interview space was comfortable and free of distractions. My attire was kept simply suggesting openness; and interview was conducted in a relaxed and open manner.

The nine questions that comprised the interview protocol provided a rough guide for the semi-structured interview. The interview began with an explanation of the nature of study and of the phenomenological process. It was also important to emphasize that the study was drawing on memory and, so I asked interviewees to think of the readying process as a journey. Readyng for the CSEC was the journey. The Exam was the destination. Hence, the interviewees were asked to focus only on the journey. Further,

they were told that everything they encountered on this journey constituted the experience of the journey and so as the interviewer, I was interested in everything they encountered, the people, the thoughts, the feelings, the systems, everything they did.

The interview proceeded from question to question. However, due to the iterative and organic nature of the phenomenological interview, there were times when I had to loop back to an earlier question or skip a question because the issues were already addressed. Further to, emerging themes also helped to guide the interviewing process and link the various interviews. For example, during the second interview, the interviewee conceptualized her state of readiness as a number (on a range of 1 to 10). For subsequent interviews, then, I asked whether interviewees thought of readiness this way. They all said yes and proceeded to assign a number to denote their respective states of readiness.

Reflective Journal

I kept a reflective journal that also served as a field journal. This journal allowed me to record and to keep track of my insights and thoughts as I conducted the interviews. This was an important part of the bracketing process. The field journal allowed for the recording of the most important responses from the participants. Additionally, I was able to record my observations of the interview as well as make theoretical notes and analytical memos. As such, it became a source for data analysis and interpretation.

Presentation of Data

The data for this study were captured by two sets of research questions. These together captured the interplay of readiness factors at and between the different levels of the socio-ecological system. Question 1 had four sub-questions which sought to shed

light on readiness factors at the individual level. Question 2 with two subquestions explored factors at the other levels. The questions however allowed for the flexibility necessary to explore of the interplay of the many factors at the various levels.

Research Question 1: What are Antiguan and Barbudan students' experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC examination? As indicated above the four subquestions that follow this main question were geared to elucidate the readiness experience particularly at the micro level.

1. What does it mean to students to be ready for the CSEC Exam?

The participants offered a range of responses to this question to include: to understand the material; to feel confident that I will pass the exam; when I am able to teach my peers, I know that I am ready; that I have mastered the content; to know that I will do well for the actual exam; to feel less anxiety as the exam approaches.

2. What are some key readiness issues as students prepare for the CSEC Exam?

The participants identified many issues that impacted their readiness experiences. A look at the data shows that these issues are found at all the levels of the social ecological system. Participants' responses included: Ability of the teachers to teach; availability of teachers; the transfer of teacher during the final year; teachers rushing through the material and not taking the time to make sure we understand; teachers making too much demands on students; the degree of stability or confusion at home; the nature and level of involvement of parents; time to study, lack of discipline, interest,

motivation, other interests of students themselves; level of support given by parents and teachers; and too much stress.

3. What readiness activities do students participate in leading up to the CSEC Exam?

From the data, it is seen that the range of readiness activities that students engaged in was very narrow but intense. These activities were geared towards increasing students understanding of the concepts taught and as well as the mastery of associated skills. Readiness activities included: Studying by self and studying in groups, spending long hours at school in after-class by subject teachers; taking afterschool or extra classes; getting tutoring from teachers or subject experts; self-testing; completing the School Based Assessment projects; and, completing practice papers.

It is also important to note that a few students strategically incorporated non-academic activities in their readiness programme. They believed that these activities helped them to be cognitively sharp as well as helped them to relieve stress they feel as they prepared for the Exam. Dancing, gym works, and playing football were reported to have contributed significantly to participants' readiness experience. The lone female who spoke about the value of afterschool, non-academic support, spoke of the importance of dancing in her readiness experience. "I created dances for the topics I'm studying. I dance to help me feel better; it motivates me and boosts my confidence. When I create a technique for the notes I have, it makes me feel like yeah...I can do this. It boosts my memory".

4. What is the meaning of readiness for students as they reflect on their preparation for the CSEC Exam?

For participants, “readiness” is synonymous with ideas of confidence, mastery, knowledge, efficacy and sharp memory. Response such as readiness means “having all you need to do well,” “knowing that you have mastered all the necessary skills,” “that you are confident,” “that you have reached a point where you will do well on the CSEC Exam, and you know it,” “I am clearheaded and focused.”

Research Question 2: How do students experience support as they prepared? This set of questions was geared at understanding the factors at other levels of the system that impacted students’ readiness experience.

5. What are the supports that contribute to the experience of readiness?

To this question, the participants identified a range of supports and further shed light on ways in which they interlinked to contribute to a better readiness experience. Friends or peers, teachers, parents and others from the community were significant players in the readiness experience dynamic.

Peers provided academic and emotional support. Responses such as “friends are there to study with you,” “my friends helped me to understand, when I am having trouble with a subject,” “my friends tested me and this helped me to know where I needed to improve,” and “my friends helped me not to feel alone and eased my stress,” all serve to underscore the importance of peer support. Many participants also expressed the view that they would not have made it without the support of their peers.

Parents are shown to be significant contributors to participants’ readiness experience. Parents provided school-related materials, motivation, structure, and emotional support to their children. Responses that bore these out include: “My mon was

there for me all the way,” “my mom saw that I was struggling with math, and so she got a tutor for me. That help was critical to me doing well for that subject,” “my aunt help me with everything, from sourcing the past papers to testing me,” “my mom made sure I took my vitamins,” “my mom ensured that I followed my schedule,” and “my mon was my cheerleader.”

All the participants reported that their teachers played a major role in their readiness experience. Teachers ability to teach, their availability outside the classroom, and their relationship with students were regarded as most important contributors to the readiness experience. One participant captured the importance of the teacher thus:

Our teachers taught us well; they care for us and they wanted us to do well.

They were hard on us at times, but we knew they cared. They were even part of our chat group. There, they provided both academic support and emotional support. We could not have done it without this support from our teachers.

Another participant told how important it was for teachers not only to provide a disciplined learning environment, but that teachers should also provide opportunities for students to learn from each other. This again underscores the significant value of peer support to the participants.

The school is seen as an extension of the teacher, and the teacher, an extension of the school. Just as participants had high expectations of teachers regarding teacher inputs, they also had high expectations for school support. All the participants reported that they expected the school to provide support through frequent motivational talks, a more learner friendly environment, the proper assignment of teachers, and the provision

of support and training for teachers who prepare them for the CSEC Exam. Here again, students understand how multilevel factors are interlinked to contribute to their experience of readiness.

The participants with strong positive readiness experiences, reported inputs by other adults who contributed in non-academic ways. The youth group leader, the dance instructor, the "machine shop" owner, and the football/soccer coach provided critical inputs to participants. One participant recounted his experience at the machine shop:

I like going to the truck yard. It was my chill time. I learn about life. I learn things that helped me with my school work, like time management and discipline...like the value of effort. The owner talked to me about reality...and that nothing good comes easy. Going to the truck yard brought me joy and so I took that with me when I'm studying my subjects.

Another student recounted his experience at football /soccer:

I loved going to play football/soccer. My coach praised me when I'm doing good. And that made me feel good and confident. It makes me feel important. It filtered over into my school work. My thinking was clear, and I understood the work better.

6. What supports are experienced as counterproductive?

The CSEC Exam is a high-stake exam and so there are a lot of activities associated with it. Many of these are not only counterproductive as per outcome, but they were also experienced by participants as negative inputs, even despite the good intent of significant others. While participants valued peer support, they also reported

that their friends provided some challenges as they prepare for the CSEC Exam and were a source of stress. Some of these challenges are captured in reports like: “Friends can be distracting,” “friends stress too much, and this rubs off on others,” and “friends can encourage others to slack off and lose focus.”

Parents also contributed negative inputs. Parents’ anxiety over their children’s performance at the CSEC Exam often translates into negative experiences for their children. Further to, participants identified these negative inputs as overinvolvement, overprotection, too much structure, and pressure resulting from unrealistic or high expectations.

Participants also identified “too much pressure to do well” as negative inputs from both teachers and the school. This general anxiety spills over into a cultural pressure that attends the CSEC preparation. Participants shared that they felt this is a very real way and most of them believed that this impacted on them negatively. One participant shared: “Everyone always asks how many subjects you are doing; are you studying? And you know that they are pressuring you to get ‘A’s!. It’s like if you don’t pass all your subjects and don’t get ones, you won’t amount to anything.”

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis seeks to explicate the essence of a phenomenon. This essence is derived from the essential meanings that are present in the descriptions of the participants. Further, this is gathered through analysis as well through the insights that come about as a result of reflective immersion in the data. Further to, according to Groenewald (2004), qualitative data analysis involves the combing of textual data for

patterns and themes and determining how these patterns and themes answer the research questions under consideration. It is an iterative, cyclical, progressive, and organic process, quite unlike the linear process of quantitative research (Taylor and Gibbs, 2010). This analysis process then began after the very first interview and continued even into the write up stage.

For this study, data analysis was done through content analysis and framework analysis. Content analysis involved the categorization of textual data. The raw data was classified, summarised, and tabulated. For the framework analysis, I employed the ‘theoretical lens in the process of transcribing the data, identifying emerging themes, coding, charting, and mapping, and interpreting the themes (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). The social ecological model loosely provided the framework for data analysis of the study.

The data analysis process started after the completion of the first interview then through the transcription of the other 11 audio recordings. Immediately after each interview, I read the interview notes and made some jottings on the interview protocol document as well as into my field note log. Then at the end of the day, I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews done that day and transcribed the recording into a document. Each document was tagged with the identifying code established for the corresponding interview. Then, the document was again reworked to include the data from the notes taken during the interview and new insights from the member checking process. Once this was completed for all the interviews, I then combed the documents for common words, ideas, and themes. These were coded. Then I looked for patterns and themes and

categorized them according to the framework that provided the conceptual lens for the study.

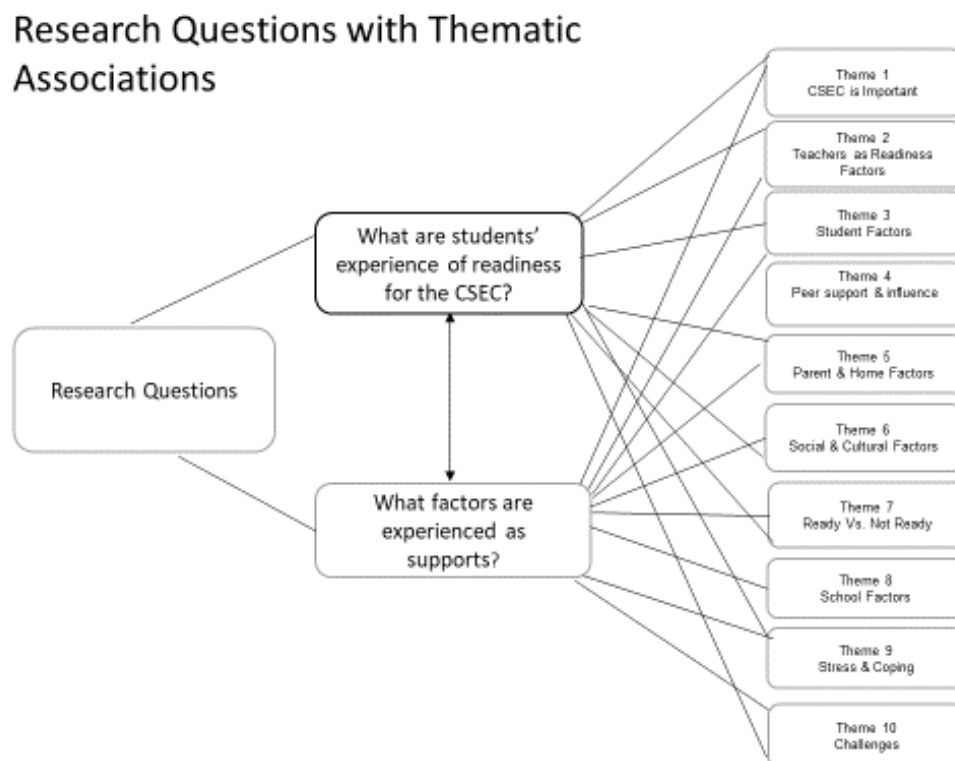


Figure 1. Research questions with thematic associations.

Results

Emergent Themes

The data from the interviews were summarized and categories resulting in 50 themes. These were further grouped, and linkages were made between them. This regrouping resulted in the following themes: (a) CSEC is very important, (b) The teacher as an important readiness factor, (c) Student attributes and factors, (d) Peer support and

influence, (e) parents, home, and family factors, (f) social and cultural factors, (g) ready versus not ready, (h) school factors, (i) stress and coping, and (j) challenges.

Theme 1: CSEC is Very Important.

All the participants shared the view that the CESC is important. To underscore just how important it is, one participant said, “the CEC is very, very, very important; it’s as if your life depended on it.” Many believed that the CSEC Exam marked a coming of age of sorts. They spent five years in secondary school and their parents spent a lot of money to pay for these exams so now, “I cannot let my secondary education and parents’ money to go to naught.” Further, success at the CESC was important for launching them into a new life. As one participant opined “without CSECs you are nothing. You won’t get a good job, and you have to settle for any old thing (job).” Consequently, practically all the participants understood the CSEC to be critical to their life chances and so thought that readying for it was important.

Table 1

Theme 1: CSEC Exam is Important

Subthemes	Sample Participants’ Responses
CSEC determines the quality of your life	When you pass your CXCs you can choose quality jobs.

	<p>Many of us see the CXC as a way to get out of Antigua.</p> <p>If you don't pass it, you won't amount to anything.</p> <p>If you don't do CSEC you have to do any old job. CSEC allows you to get better jobs.</p>
Feelings about the CESC	<p>I hated the CSEC.</p> <p>I was happy because I was finishing school.</p> <p>I was overwhelmed all the time.</p> <p>The whole experience was awful. I cannot remember one good thing about it.</p>
Performance Expectations	<p>CSEC is a lot of reading so I made up my mind.</p> <p>Everyone expects you to get ones and they don't know the pressure they are putting you under.</p> <p>Everyone thinks that you should be studying all the time.</p>
CSEC is stressful	<p>I was anxious about the exam</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Table continues)</i></p> <p>CXC was a lot of stress. The way they make the Exam seems it would destroy some students.</p>

Theme 2: Teachers as an Important Readiness Factor

All the participants agreed that teachers are extremely important in the CSEC preparation process. According to them, the coverage of the respective curricula, teaching lessons, providing guidance and giving feedback, and maintaining caring relationships are important teacher inputs into helping them to be ready for the CSEC Exam.

Coverage of respective syllabi. Teachers are to cover a set syllabus that provides the content on which students are tested for each subject or course for the CESC Exam. Therefore, completion of a syllabus is an important variable in the readiness discourse and experience. Most of the participants believed that their teachers did a relatively good job at covering the courses. However, a few believed that some of their teachers spent too much time on certain topics. This will result in either an incomplete coverage of the syllabus, or teachers “rushing through certain topics”, leaving some students feeling anxious as to their chances of passing the course.

Teacher availability and accessibility. Teachers are scheduled to a set number of hours per course or subject. This time is equated to the amount of time needed to cover the syllabus, therefore it is important that teachers present for classes. Four participants shared that teachers did not always show up for classes, or that they would be “always late,” thereby cutting down on the time they have to cover the course. Two participants also believed that the fact that “teacher came late into the year ... had a big impact on my understanding of the subject.”

Some teachers were accessible, but some were not. All participants agreed that being able to meet with the teacher on a one on one level, outside of the classroom, was important. One participant from a coed private school shared that “all of our teachers were really cool; we could approach them at any time. We even had chat groups that they were a part of.” However, few participants noted that teachers seemed to be more accessible to students who “were doing well in the subject areas; and those of us who were struggling were left up to ourselves.” Students who were considered “teachers’ pets” also had more access to teachers.

Teaching style and ability. Participants were sensitive as to the teaching ability of their teachers. Teachers who can teach are “those who can make us understand and they go the extra mile to help us understand.” Also, according to one participant, teachers who can teach also seem to be “those who love the subjects that they teach” and “believe in their ability to teach.” That teachers’ love for their subjects and their ability to teach are critical to the readying process, have been appreciated by participants. One participant summed this up like this “when teachers love their subjects, I can feel it. It gets me excited about the subject and makes me love it. If I love it, then I will study it more.”

All the participants valued the guidance that they got from their teachers, particularly guidance on the School-Based Assessment, the SBA, which accounts for 20% of the CSEC Exam grade. Students also valued in-class guidance, but they were particularly thankful for the out of class guidance. “I love when I can go to my teacher outside of the classroom and ask for help. The situation there is less tense, and I seem to

understand better.” Additionally, teachers’ feedback is highly valued by all the participants. This feedback provided a gauge to students as to how likely they are to pass the various subjects for the CSEC Exams.

Classroom management. “Some teachers cannot control their classes and we wasted a lot of time because they spent more time dealing with students’ poor behaviour.” (Participant 5) This did not only “eat into the time” that teachers had to cover the syllabus, but it was distracting. Participant 7 underscored the importance of classroom management to the readying process:

I cannot sit and study by myself, I get bored, I just cannot do it. I learn best at school, so I pay attention in the classroom. When there is distraction, it throws me off. So, for me, how the teacher handled his or her class was important to me.

Relationship with the students. “Our teachers were cool,” “they are interested in us;” “they wanted the best for us;” “they would go out of their way, go the extra mile;” “those were the teachers that I loved, and I loved the subject that they taught. I prepared better for them.” Those were sentiments expressed by participants who liked their teachers, and who thought their teachers liked them. On the other hand, though, some students reported that their teachers did not care much: “teaching was just like going through the motion;” “the teachers did not take a keen interest, like they did not care. In fact, some of them reminded us that they will draw their salaries whether or not we did well.” One participant shared how this attitude by teachers made it difficult for them to learn their subjects: “These teachers made it difficult to get it; I tend not to like those

subjects, and it made it difficult for me to study.” Further, some participants also noted that teachers had special relationship with some students. These students according to them “got more attention from the teachers”, and they felt that this was unfair as they had to seek this kind of attention from other persons outside of the school setting and then, they often had to pay for this kind of support.

Overall, most of the students believed that teachers made a great difference with respect to how they prepared for the CSEC Exam. one participant summed up this as:

My teachers made a huge difference. The ones that helped me were the ones that taught better and had more experience teaching for the CSEC. I had more confidence in them, and I felt better about my ability to pass the CSEC”. (Participant 12)

Table 2

Theme 2: Teachers as an Important Readiness Factor

Subthemes	Respondent Participant Responses
Academic support	<p>Teachers provide guidance and knowledge.</p> <p>Testing and feedback were very important to me.</p> <p>Teachers should teach the SBA as it is a component of the CSEC; just giving you guidelines is not enough.</p>

Teacher-student relationship

Dislike for the teacher caused me to dislike the subject and affected how I prepared for it.

(Table continues)

All my teachers cared and that made me want to work.

Our teachers had a strong emotional bond with us they cared for us outside of school.

If I love the teacher my attitude towards the subject is different.

Teaching ability

A boring teacher can make you lose interest. For math I lost interest, so I did not put in any effort in that class. I

found the class difficult, so I had no interest. It was difficult for me to focus.

I had confidence in my teachers' ability.

How teachers prepare to teach is important too.

Teachers should use more engaging and fun methods to teach.

Teacher turnover and availability

I had three teachers in one year for one subject and that was not helpful. We did not complete the syllabus and I did not feel ready to sit it.

Teacher absence cause me much anxiety.

Sometimes teachers sit in the staffroom and don't come to class we miss out valuable time this way, besides it shows they don't care.

Theme 3: Student Factors and Attributes

The participants were all aware that they were a major element in the readying process. They noted a variety of personal factors that impacted their readiness experience to include (a) self-processes, (b) cognitions and emotions (c) their approach, and (d) coping with stress.

Self-processes. Most of the participants believed that it is important to be aware of “what is going on inside of them” such as their thoughts and feelings as these can “keep you back or they can energize you” (Male participant).

Additionally, according to most of the participants, students should be aware of what it is “they know, and what they don't know.” In other words, they should have a good sense as to how knowledgeable they are in a course or subject. In this way, they can take appropriate measures to get ready for the Exam. When asked what these measures might be, most participants agreed that students can increase their own effort such as studying more, reaching out to their teachers for extra help or “even going to extra classes.” Some participants also reported that they were aware of the conditions that aided or prevented their learning. To bear this out one participant said, “I know I do not work well under stress,” and another shared that “I do like to study so I paid attention in class. I learn better that way.”

In addition to self-awareness, self-efficacy was identified by all the participants as a student attribute that is critical to the readiness process. A history of good academic performance increases self-efficacy. One participant underscored this: “I have never repeated. I have always done well in school, and I usually do well in my subjects, so I knew that I had what it takes to do well for the CSEC. I have always done well.” Most of the students who expressed doubt about their ability, were those who did not have a history of an overall satisfactory academic performance or consistent performance for individual subjects. Math is a good example. Most of the participants did not have a consistently strong academic performance for Math and so preparation for that subject was attended by “self-doubt and anxiety”.

Cognitions and emotions. Personal values helped to keep students focused and motivated. Some of the values that framed students’ preparation for the CSEC Exam included, gratitude (“I am thankful to parent and teachers and I want to make them proud”), ownership (“take responsibility for my work”), education (“education is important”), and discipline (“it is important to stay focused and (to) set priorities”).

Participants who felt good about their preparation also were the ones who understood how they learned. They were aware of their thinking processes and were able to capitalize on their learning style. “I study for 5 minutes and go and play football, then while I’m playing, I’m processing, ...and I am aware that this is happening.” Another participant shared: “I pay keen attention in class. I am not a person who would go home and study. So, I made good use of my in-class time so that when I go home, I have “me’

time. Time to relax.” Participant 11 explained how she used dance to help her learn and remember the concepts:

I love to dance. I danced to help me feel better about my work and to motivate me and boost my confidence. When I create a technique or a move for the notes I am learning, it makes me feel, like yeah...I can do this. It boosted my memory.

Another participant shared that he is “a practical, hands-on person. I need to do it, to get it better, to get it properly.” Yet another said, I prefer somebody to teach me. I learn it much better that way.”

Additionally, the beliefs and attributions that participants held impacted their readiness of the CSEC. A range of beliefs were reported and these included “I believe in myself,” “I believe that I was going to do well,” “I believe that if I put in the effort, I will be victorious,” “I believe my teachers wanted the best for me,” “No one is responsible for my success but me,” “I believed that I had what it takes to pass my subjects,” “I believe that preparation is important, you cannot do well if you do not prepare,” “I did not believe I would pass Math.” These beliefs and attributions helped to motivate participants and as well as helped to determine how they approached their CSEC preparation. Some beliefs were counterproductive, however.

According to participants, a myriad of emotions attended the readiness process. Fear was experienced by almost all the participants. They were fearful that if they failed the exam, they would shame their parents and teachers. Responses such as “I did not want my parents to be disappointed in me,” and “I had a fear of failure; if I failed that

would be wasting my parents' money and my teachers' time." Other emotions that they identified included "anxiety" about their chances of doing well for the exam and disappointing parents and teachers, "doubt" about their ability to negotiate the exam, and "uncertainty" about the nature of the exam. These were all negative emotions and contributed to the stress that students experienced.

Participants also experienced positive emotions. A few of them reported that they felt relief particularly because they were nearing the completion of their secondary school tenure. They were glad to be finishing school and moving on with their lives. Confidence was the strongest positive emotion identified. One participant described confidence as a "strong nice feeling, a belief that I can do it." As confidence increased doubt and uncertainty decreased and "I felt more relaxed, and can I think and remember more." Interest was another strong emotion that was identified by participants. Interest in the subject, as well as interest in the teacher were particularly noted. One participant shared that "interest in and love for the subject made it easy for me to learn and to study for the exam." Further, one student upon reflection with respect to the CSEC results, noted that those subjects that "I had more interest in and love for were the ones I did better in; those were the ones I felt most ready for." It is important to note as well that participants shared that teachers' interest in them and in teaching the subject also impacted their own interest for the subject and hence impacted their preparation.

Readiness approaches. Participants identified several approaches that they used to prepare for the CSEC. These can fit into two categories, stressed and relaxed. The stressed approach entails all the traditional preparation activities: A hectic schedule of

studying, long hours of studying, little sleep, extra classes outside of the regular school hours, very little or no social activity, intense monitoring by parents. Participants who used the stressed approach also reported very high level of stress. The ‘relaxed approach’ as presented by participants was in stark contrast to this. Few students reported that they made a conscious decision to take a relaxed approach. For example, one participant said, “I know I do not work well under stress, and so I know that this long studying would not work for me.” This relaxed approach included (a) maximizing class time, so that “I could have ‘me time’ at home, (b) scheduling breaks in between the study periods, (c) study for short periods of time, (d) incorporating exercise or some sort of physical activity, and (e) factoring in social time with friends.

Table 3

Theme 3: Student Factors and Attributes

Subthemes	Sample Participant responses
Self-awareness	<p>When I knew I was not doing well in a subject, I dedicated more time to it.</p> <p>My subconscious told me that I’m not ready. When I became ready, I knew, I was excited like “yeah I can do this!</p>
Values and Beliefs	<p>I kept a positive attitude, positive attitude lead to positive outcome and negative attitude leads to negative outcome.</p> <p>I told myself that failure was not an option.</p>

	Effort brings good results.
	I told myself that failure was not an option.
Metacognition	I know that I do not study well by myself.
	I knew that if I did my own work, I'd understand it better.
	Sometimes I'd copy the assignment, and then I would not understand.
Emotions	When I love the subject, I learn it better.
	I'm afraid that I won't do well.
	Subjects I love, I put more time in them.
	I doubt myself sometimes, and then I notice that I lose interest, and do not study as much.
	(Table continues)
	I'd go to the truck yard and football field, and I'll feel happy. This joy pushes me to work for what I want including doing well on the CSEC.
Ownership	I made a decision that resulted in a string of behaviours: I stopped procrastination and studied my notes consistently.
	Nobody can do my work for me.
	I took lessons from y football game; discipline focus, and I took care of my body.

Approach

I procrastinated for those subjects I did not like, those I did not feel ready for. For those I felt ready for, I was more consistent.

I blocked out things that stressed me, did not stay out late, did not go out much and I ate right.

I focused a lot on past papers. I did that to practice the kind of questions that are likely to come because CXC like to repeat the questions. I also go to understand the structure of the paper.

Relax.

Theme 4. Peers Support and Influence

Peers were a critical component of the readiness process. From the data gathered, it is seen that peers provided academic support, emotional support, and provided a gauge as to their own performance, progress, and readiness.

Academic support. All the participants placed a very high value on the assistance they received from their peers as they prepared for the CSEC Exam. Peers provided opportunity for consolidation of the material to be studied. Study groups were particularly helpful. One participant explained how they organized the study group:

We had a mixed group.... mixed in every way, bright students and weak ones. Also, boys and girls. When we study, we set our goals; the weak ones would prepare and teach the strong ones. In teaching they get

stronger, and the strong ones would offer guidance. This way the weak ones are forced to study (Participant 6)

These study groups provided opportunities for students to practice, and to receive important and timely feedback. Here, students also assessed each other, and this performance provided important information as to their readiness. In fact, one participant said, “the more I was able to answer the questions, the more I knew I was ready and the more confident I became.”

Emotional support. “CSEC is very stressful and there are lots of uncertainties; my peers helped me feel normal, they helped me to get through the rough times.” Participants noted valuable peer inputs such as “a shoulder to lean on”, a kind ear, timely reminders that “this is not the end of the world”, reaffirming reminders “that you can do this”. Sometimes through friends were a source of stress: “many of them were just losing it, they were crying all the time and when I saw that I too became very stressed” (Participant 6).

Social comparison. Peers provide a gauge as to how students are progressing. “If my friends know the answer to a question and I don’t, that gives me an idea as to how I’m doing, Then I will go home and study and try my best to do better to keep up.” Another participant shared, “we talk about our strengths and weaknesses and we help each other.” Participants also looked toward their peers to get an idea as to the amount of effort and time they should be putting in “when my friends saw me playing football, they would get concerned and chide me for not studying enough; most time I would ignore them, but sometimes I’m concerned that I’m not studying as hard as they were.”

Social life. Peers did not only provide academic support, but they provided needed opportunities to break from the “CSEC hustle” and used the time together to have some “down time”. A few students found time to socialize, to relieve the stress. While these were generally welcomed, a few of them considered them to be distractions. Some participants lamented that they had no social life as their parents prevented them from doing anything other than studying for the CSEC. Responses such as “my grandfather is always hovering over me,” “my aunt would be always saying that if I don’t put in the time, put in the work, then I won’t do well, so I did not have a social life,” “My mom prevented me from playing football, that made me sad,” all underscored that point.

Table 4

Theme 4: Peer Support and Influence

Sub-themes	Sample Participants responses
------------	-------------------------------

Academic support	<p>My study group made a big difference.</p> <p>My friends helped to keep me focused.</p> <p>We leaned on each other; where one was weak, we helped. We used our strengths to help each other.</p>
Emotional support	<p>My friends comforted me, reminded me of my abilities and provided perspective. In return I tutored them.</p>
Social comparison	<p>Peer acceptance is important, and it affected my preparation. I worried that If I did not do as well as my friends, they would not accept me.</p> <p>My friends quizzed me and when I did not know I knew that I was lagging behind.</p> <p>I felt like I had to keep up with my friends. I did not want to be left.</p> <p>My friends are always asking me how I'm doing. I did not want to disappoint them.</p>

Theme 5: Parents, Home, and Family Factors

Participants agreed that parents were vital to their preparation for the CSEC. For the most part, parents had a positive impact on the readiness process. Parental inputs that were identified as important to the CSEC preparation included stability, provision of

basic needs such as food and shelter, emotional support and guidance, encouragement, motivation, a good parent-child relationship, and expectations, as well as critical academic resources.

Environment. Most participants noted that their parents provided a relatively stable environment “particularly during CSEC time”. “My mom made sure that I had a desk and that the house was good for me study”. Another participant said “they gave me my space and relieved me of some of my chores. That way I had time to study,” “my mother provided structure and rules,” are some of the responses they bore this out. Parents also went out their way to make sure parents had adequate food, and some even provided nutritional supplements. One participant however noted that his “environment was chaotic and cold and did not help with getting me in the study mood.” Another one reported how the familiarity of home made it difficult for him to study:

Routine can be a bother, there are things you get accustomed to and so you need to get out of the house to force you into another behaviour. There are too many cues that do not allow me to study at home (Participant 8).

Parents provided academic support. Many Parents were able to provide their children with the necessary academic supports. These included CSEC past papers, study guides, and subject-related supplies. Also, when students appeared to be struggling parents who are financially able sent them to extra classes or provided a tutor. Participants felt that these were important and credited them for their level of readiness. One participant said “if I didn’t go to extra class, I would not have passed that subject. I was not understanding the teacher. The extra classes are smaller and so I had more time

with the teacher.” Another participant said, “my mom saw that I was struggling with Math and got me a tutor. That gave me more one on one time with the tutor; that was very, very important for me.”

Overinvolvement of parents/family. Many participants experienced and reported an overinvolvement of parents and other family members in their CSEC Exam preparation that they considered negative. Responses such as, “my grandfather was hovering over me all the time,” and “my mother was always on my case, I just could not relax or breathe,” are examples of the kind of involvement that participants considered counterproductive. Some participants believed though, that they needed this kind of involvement for them to keep focused. One participant recalled:

My aunt did everything for me: She went online, did the research looked at the syllabi and got the answers. She pushed me. My aunt was going along all the way, doing all the preparation. She would get upset when I was taking long to understand, then I’d get upset. I did not want to disappoint her. My aunt was very important as I got ready for the CSEC (Participant 2).

Theme 5: Parents, Home, and Family Factors

Sub themes	Sample Participants Responses
Academic support	<p data-bbox="857 415 1377 533">My mom got me past papers to help me understand the CESC format and to help me practice.</p> <p data-bbox="857 583 1370 743">My cousins and siblings who did the exam before me told me what to expect. They also helped me to deal with the stress.</p> <p data-bbox="857 793 1370 869">My mother tested me. Testing is a must when you are preparing (for the CSEC).</p>
Emotional support	<p data-bbox="857 919 1347 1079">My parents talked to me. They knocked some sense into me. They helped me understand how the CXC is important they wanted me to have a good life.</p> <p data-bbox="857 1129 1386 1289">My mom encouraged me. She told me no matter what she'd be still proud of me. This unconditional acceptance boosted my confidence.</p> <p data-bbox="857 1339 1347 1457">I have a large family, and word get around quickly, but they all supported me in every way.</p>
Home Environment	<p data-bbox="857 1507 1364 1583">I have a strong family network we keep close and we share stuff.</p> <p data-bbox="857 1633 1331 1709">My mother died so there was a bit of sadness, but my siblings stepped up.</p>

I could not study at home. It was too routine and too many things there got me in a no study mood.

(Table continues)

Other support

I had a balanced life. My mom balanced it for me. I was not allowed to go anywhere during that time. I knew it was for my good, so I was okay with it.

My aunt sets the expectations and rules and I had to follow them.

My mom made sure I got my vitamins.

Theme 6: Social and Cultural factors

The CSEC Exam has much social and cultural importance. All the participants are aware of this. They believe that the CSEC Exam represent a threshold to a better life. “It opens doors”. It is the cultural expectation that students upon the completion of their secondary school tenure sit the CSEC Exam and that they do well. “Doing well” means passing all their subjects with quality grades (Grades 1 and 2). Therefore, the CSEC Exam preparation is attended by both self-inflicted pressure and pressure from the outside. “The whole place is tense”.

Cultural expectation. All participants were cognizant of the cultural expectations around performance at the CSEC as well as to the set of behaviours that were expected of them viz a viz the CSEC Exam preparation. According to one participant, “everyone was always asking you about CSEC, like if you don’t pass you won’t amount

to anything.” So, students were expected to “be always studying”, “have no playtime.” Consequently, if students are believed to be “slacking”, they were met with much criticism. “The pressure is also great to get a Grade 1.”

Family status. Participants are also aware that their performance at the CSEC has implications for the social standing of their families. When students do well at the CSEC Exam, families benefit as their social economic status improves. Hence parents accrue bragging rights from their children’s successful performance at the CSEC. It is little wonder then that many participants reported that they work hard because they do not want to disappoint their parents or waste their money.

Table 6

Theme 6: Social and Cultural Factors

Sub-themes	Sample Participants Responses
Cultural expectations	<p>Parents send you to school so that you came come out good.</p> <p>Everyone expects you to kill yourself (make great effort) studying.</p> <p>Everybody expects grade 1s even though they know to their heart that you won’t get it. But that’s all they say</p>
Family status	<p>I want my family to feel good and proud.</p> <p>My cousins did CXC before and my mon wants me to do just as good or better than they did.</p>
Supports	<p>When you have persons who care about you, you want to do the right thing.</p>

My coach helped me a lot.

The library was helpful too.

I was not able to get internet because my family could not afford.

Theme 7: Readiness versus not readiness

Readiness has already been identified as a multidimensional construct, and the lived experiences as described by participants bore this out. When participants were asked “what does it mean for you to be ready and how is ready different to not ready the answers they provided illuminated the phenomenon with respect to its quality and structure, the facilitative and inhibitory factors, and they also identified major players in this readiness process. Participants were very aware of the qualitative difference between “ready” and “not ready (See Tables 7 & 8).

Table 7

Readiness Qualities Identified by Participants

Not Ready	Ready
Cognitive confusion	Clarity of thought and thinking
Doubt	Belief in my ability to do well
Anxiety	Confidence
Lack of understanding	Understanding
Stressed	Relaxed
Overwhelm	Comfort

Unable to remember

Sharp memory

According to participants, being ready has cognitive, affective, and behavioural components: Cognitively, ready is experienced as clarity of thought and thinking, and awareness of knowing, curiosity that leads to exploration of knowledge, a sharpness of memory and focus. Responses such as “I took up the book, and the information looked familiar, I quizzed myself and I got the answers correct, then I knew it! I was ready!” and “I had clarity of mind; I was sharp, and my memory was good too” illuminate the cognitive element of readiness.

From the data, it is seen that “not ready” is the opposite of “ready”. One participant summed it up thus “nothing I’m reading makes sense, I’m struggling to make sense. Like things not connecting in my brain.” Another participant described a similar experience: “I looked at the book and things looked weird, like an out of body experience, things not getting through, like things knocking a wall.” The responses show a clear difference between the cognitive state of ‘being ready’ and ‘not being ready’.

The affective component of readiness includes feelings of confidence, curiosity, while feelings of doubt, anxiety, and fear were experienced when students were not ready. All participants identified confidence as a critical factor in their state of readiness. Confidence was described as “a good feeling that comes from you knowing something that you have what it takes to do well and knowing that you will do well.” Confidence is not static; it can get stronger over the course of the CSEC preparation if certain factors obtain. These input factors are provided by parents, teachers, and peers. They included

encouragement, motivation, care and concern, guidance and feedback. Perhaps one of the most significant factors that facilitate confidence building is the one-on-one or individualized attention given to students by teachers, or that is afforded by tutors. One participant noted, “I would not have made it if I did not get the special help by my teacher.” Another participant recalled how the special attention given to her by the tutor boosted her confidence in that subject, and “it spilled over to the other subjects as well.” It is important to note here though that many participants felt that teachers were selective to whom this one and one attention or special attention, was given. According to one student teachers were especially attentive to and provided more one on one attention to students who they liked, and those who were “bright”. “I was struggling for one subject; I was slow, my teacher was not helping me like I wanted. I had to go to extra class. That helped me a lot. I felt better about my chances of passing it.”

Further to, participants reported that as their confidence grew, their approach to their preparation changed for the better. “Consistency”, “focus” and “relaxed” were some of the words that were used to characterize this approach that is associated with confidence. Conversely, “procrastination”, “cramming”, and “stressed” were associated with the approach when they felt they were not ready. Confidence then is the function of several inputs; this then sets in motion a train of behaviours that propel students towards readiness.

Facilitatory and inhibitory factors. Participants also identified several factors that supported or prevented them from feelings as is they were ready. These were found at both intrapersonal and extra personal levels. At the intra personal level, they identified

factors such as interest, personal values, ownership, learning style, self-awareness. These two contrasting responses for example show ownership as an important antecedent to readiness: “there was just the realization that I had work to do, and I just decided to do it;” “I was not serious; it did not click in my head, I was just slacking.” Similarly, “I believe that effort leads to good result, and this caused me to try hard” and “Education is important; CSEC opens doors,” are examples of value perspectives that provided the impetus for students as they readied themselves for the CSEC.

From the data, there were a myriad of extrapersonal factors that supported or prevented readiness. These included support, structure, guidance, feedback relationship, values, expectation, and tutelage. Some participants also reported how “teachers went of their way to give them “extra help”, or how family helped them deal with stress by keeping them grounded, or how friends help them to feel normal. Participants were also clear as to the factors that militated against their efforts to be ready. Responses that bear this out include: “it’s just too much stress,” “my mom was too nagging and I tend to do the opposite,” “it’s just too much work and a hectic schedule, its overwhelming, sometimes I just block it all out.”

In response to the question “what was the most significant factor in your CSEC preparation, two participants said “football”. One of them shared:

I play football. I am good at it. It makes me feel good about myself, makes me feel important, makes me feel happy like I’m on top of the world. These feelings come over into my school work I am able

to think clearly, and I know I have the ability. The discipline helps me keep focused (Participant 8)

Another participant shared:

Chill time is important if you are going to do well on the CXC. I deliberately put in chill time. That's when I go to the truck yard, even though my mon and aunt tried to stop me. At the truck yard I learn to operate the machinery, and I drive, and I feel good. I look forward to it every day. At the truck yard, I learn about reality, that nothing comes easy and that you have to prepare to succeed. The truck yard provided real experience and let me realize I have the ability. If not the truck yard, then it's football. If I did not have them, I'd be demotivated. They gave me joy, and joy pushes me to work for what you want. They made me feel comfortable, empowered, and that spilled over into my CSEC readiness (Participant 6).

Other factors that were identified as the critical elements included peers, "my friends were there for me. They took my mind off stuff and they helped me;" study group, "my study group was soooo important we helped each other;" and teachers, "if it were not for my teachers, I would not have been ready."

Readiness threshold. Many participants reported being aware of a turning point that set them on a trajectory towards readiness. A sense of ownership, "a realization that I have work to do", "the inevitability of the exam", and "confidence in my ability" have

been identified as characteristic elements of this turning point. This then transcends to a feeling of readiness that many of the participants refer to as “feeling comfortable”. One participant described “comfortable” thus: “my belief that I can deliver, that I have the requisite skills, that I have the supports that I needed, and that I will be successful.”

Theme 7B: Readiness Attributes

Sub-themes	Sample Participants Responses
Quality	<p>I'm focused.</p> <p>I feel familiar with the work.</p> <p>I knew I'd do well. I had the ability and I knew the information.</p> <p>I am clearheaded. I am making connections in my head.</p>
Structure	<p>My mind is settled, I have sharp focus When I made up my mind to study and take CSEC serious, it was easier for me (Ownership)</p> <p>Interest kept me curious, and I studied more (Interest)</p> <p>I knew that I had the ability to pass) (Self-efficacy)</p>
Inputs	<p>I think I could have done better if I had resources such as the internet. (Support)</p> <p>In addition to teaching, my teachers provided guidance and feedback (Tutelage)</p> <p>My coach helped me understand life. Effort leads to success and to be disciplined (Care and concern)</p>

(Table continues)

Activities	My mom organized my life...so I had a schedule. I knew when I was supposed to do what (Structure)
	You have to beat the books, get familiar with the material there is no other way (Study)
	I took me time; time to chill out and free up the mind (Rest)
	Any kind of testing. Self-testing, testing by parents, friends, teachers. When you know the answers, you know you are ready (Testing)
	I got past papers and did practice questions. (Practice)

Readiness process. The process to getting to this place of comfort was however “tough” for many participants. One participant shared how she “studied so hard” that she became ill. Other participants used words such as “overwhelmed”, “frightened”, “worried”, and “ignorant” to describe the early stages of CSEC preparation. However, as they applied themselves, took ownership, studied, practised, and received feedback, over time they moved into to a place of confidence and comfort... “when I looked at the material and things made sense, and I felt good about my chances of doing well.”

Readiness-unitary or composite. For the CSEC, students sit several courses or subjects. Participants in this study sat a range of 8 to 12 subjects. It is of note that participants reported that they had a different readiness experience for each of their subjects. This was determined by their own sense of self-efficacy, natural ability, their love for and interest in the subject, the ability of the teacher, their love for the teacher, and the other supports they got from others. Consequently, they felt readier for some subjects than they did for others. It is of note though that the overall readiness was an amalgam of the readiness experienced for the individual subjects. In other words, the readier they felt for individual subject the greater their overall sense of readiness. It was also interesting to note that this strong sense of readiness for individual subject had a positive carry over effect on their preparation for other subjects. Only one participant noted that he experienced subject readiness discretely, that readiness for one subject did not impact his sense of readiness for other subjects.

Theme 8: School Factors

The school provides the environment within which students learn and it provides many of the supports that students need to do well on the CSEC Exam. It is of note that school culture and image, management of curriculum and assignment of teachers are some school elements that are implicated in readiness for the CSEC Exam (Table 9)

School culture and image. The fifth form year is structured around the CSEC Exam. Increased activities such as extra classes, the completion of the School Based Assessment (SBA) project, and extra motivational chats for fifth formers attest to the seriousness of the CSEC Exam. Further, students in preparing for the CSEC Exam,

understand that it is the expectation of the school that they do well in order “to make the school proud”. Awareness of this expectation is the driving force for many students. Additionally, “you know that the school is depending on you to do well to get bragging rights. This is a big thing in my school, so you want to do your best to make the school proud.”

Assignment of teachers and management of syllabi. All the participants agreed that teachers are a critical component of the readiness process. One thing that stood out was the actual time the teachers had to teach the course. According to participants, teaching time was impacted by tardiness of teachers and teacher turnover, both of which impacted the actual delivery of the subject/course. Responses such as “some of my teachers were absent frequently and this caused me to lose interest in the subject and also caused me to doubt my ability to pass,” “for one of my subjects, I had three different teachers, and it seemed like we never really completed the work,” “one of my teachers was a new teacher and she spent a lot of time on one topic, and then we had to rush through the others. That was not good at all” tell of students’ perception of the impact of teacher.

Hectic schedule. Participants bemoaned the hectic schedules that they were forced to peruse in preparation for the CSEC Exam. One participant shared that “it’s very hectic: I go to school, then after school, I take extra classes, then I come home and study way into the night”. According to another participant, “this mad rush is because everyone is” anxious about the CSEC and wants the students to do well; so, they think that all of the time should be consumed by the CSEC; it’s really crazy”. Another participant bemoaned the fact that “most teachers make heavy demands on us because they want us to pass their subjects, so

many of them also have extra classes”. Participants also reported that their hectic schedules impacted them negatively. One participant said: “My schedule was so hectic, it was making me sick, so I had to just close off”.

Table 9

Theme 8: School Factors

Sub-themes	Sample Participants Responses
School culture	<p>My school has high standards. That puts pressure on you, like stress. But it also pushes you to do your best.</p> <p>My school did not provide much support for the SBA, students had to find their way.</p> <p>I think school start preparing for CSEC too late. They should begin in Form 4.</p> <p>I did not do my best because school did not make me happy. It was too much stress.</p>
Teacher issues	<p>Some of my teachers were always late.</p> <p>Teachers spent too much time on some topics and too little on some.</p> <p>Teachers should love what they teach; that helps students to be interested in the subject and it makes it easier for them to study.</p>
Scheduling	<p>There is too much work especially with the SBA</p>

Teachers spend too much time on certain topics.

Seems like all teachers want their work at the same time. That's too stressful.

Theme 9: Stress and Coping

Secondary school culminates in the CSEC Exam, the results of which are life altering. When students do well, they have their “pick of good jobs,” they are better positioned to “leave Antigua and Barbuda for greener pasture”, and they “can go on to higher education”. Students also know that their families are depending on them to perform well. In fact, many parents raise the funds that are necessary to cover the expenses associated with writing the CSEC and therefore they see this as an investment. Students then, do not want to disappoint their parents, and “waste their money.” Added to this, schools and teachers waste no time in stressing to students just how important these exams are. Students then have little choice but to understand the significance of the CSEC, and this often translates into anxiety and stress. Notwithstanding this however, many participants believed that “this pressure pushes me to be my best.” Overall, the CSEC is stressful for many students and Table 10 summarizes students’ experience of stress associated with CSEC preparation.

Experience of stress. Stress is one of the words used by students most often during the interviews. All the participants experienced some level of stress and were concerned about the impact it had on them during the CSEC preparation. Participants identified physiological impact as well as cognitive and affective impacts. Physiological

impact included “heart pounding”, “headaches”, and “body aches”. Participants also described changes in eating pattern, with some participants reporting that they overate, while some had loss of appetite. Sleep patterns were also affected, and some students reported that they got little sleep or that they could not sleep. One student described her experience of stress this:

It was just a lot of work. Everyone was stressing me out, my friends, teachers, everyone, and I began to slack off. I could not eat, and I was getting sick. I had to go to the doctor to get medication to eat and I did not go to school for whole week. I was not in the mood for persons asking me if I’m ready for the CSEC, so I retreated and blocked out everyone (Participant 11).

Another participant recalled:

I was stressed out. I remember one night I had a dream that I got back my results and got all F’s and I woke up I was sweating and hyperventilating. I can also remember that some of my friends were even getting physically sick and throwing up at school.

Yet another student shared:

I’ll be studying in my room with all the books then my body would literally hurt, then I’d psych myself out and afraid to stop for fear of missing something (Participant, 12).

Participants also recalled the effects that stress had on them cognitively. These effects included mental confusion, the inability to think and make sense of the work, and

inability to understand and remember. One participant who observed the impact of stress on her cognition she said, “when I stress, I forget.” Another participant also shared that “when I’m relaxed, there is a steady flow of information that comes to mind,” Yet another shared, “I did not get stressed; I just took things cool I went with the flow. I did not overthink things.”

Further to, responses such as “stress makes me doubt myself,” “stress makes me feel frightened and confused,” and “I do not work well under stress, I was anxious and worried” are examples of the affective impact of stress on students preparing for the CSEC Exam.

Students identified several behaviour that sabotaged their readiness goals while they were in stress mode. These behaviors included procrastination, partying, focusing on those subjects they liked to the detriment of the others, and engaging with social media. While some of these behaviours relieved the stress for a while, students reported that when they returned to the reality of the CSEC preparation, the fact that they “wasted time” contributed to them feeling more stressed.

Stressors: The participants identified several stressors that attended their CSEC preparation. These included : high expectation (“everyone thinks that you are to pass all your subject with grade 1s”), the uncertainty of the Exams (“not knowing what topics will be covered in the exam is stressful”), hectic schedules, (“there is so much to do that there is not enough time in the say, its study, study, study”), the SBA, (There is a lot to do and the guide sheet they provide is not nearly enough help”), peers (“when my friends

keep asking me ‘are you ready, are you ready?’ and that just stressed me out”), parents (“my mother did not want to see me without a book in my hand”).

Adolescence stresses: According to some of the participants, they experienced stress that had nothing to do the CSEC or preparation for it but impacted it, nonetheless. One participant called it “teens stuff”. These included “boys-girls stuff”, “the need for acceptance”, and “the need to feel in control of your life”. One participant shared that “from time to time boys’ and girls’ stuff would flare up; like two girls liking the same guy and then there are rumors and tense moments. This can be distracting, you know.” Another participant shared how she worried about her performance and whether her friends would accept her if she did not too well. “I spent a lot of time worrying about this.” Yet another participant recalled the power struggle with his mom. “I hate people pushing me around and telling me what to do, so when she nagged me to study, I did something else.”

Coping strategies. According to one participant, “the most significant factor that can impact you during this time is stress; once you can conquer that, you will do well.” Coping therefore is a major concern of all the participants and the methods they used to cope with the stress are many and varied. While all the participants acknowledged that stress was a huge part of the CSEC Exam preparation experience, only about six of them strategically and consistently worked to reduce the stress. Strategies the described included physical activity, and cognitive/affective methods

Almost all the male participants engaged in physical activity as a way of relieving stress. Football, the gym, and aerobic exercise were mentioned. Participants reported that

the benefits that they realized included “a free and clear mind” and a relaxed feeling. A clear mind, another noted, was important since “once I have a clear mind the information would flow more freely” (understanding would come more easily). A female participant explained how she used dance to help her cope.

Cognitive and emotional strategies that participants used in the CSEC readiness process included self-talk and affirmations. Most participants reported that from time to time they would repeat positive sayings to themselves especially when they felt doubtful or afraid. One participant described how she posted affirmations on her dressing table mirror every morning and would repeat them to herself while looking at herself in the mirror. Another participant said that he meditated “as a way to keep cool or less stressed and relaxed.”

Further, according to one participant, “it’s all about balance,” and she went on to show how she achieved balance and kept stress at bay. According to her, balance was achieved with an appropriate mix of studying, spending time with friends for a little socializing, self-care to include eating well, getting adequate rest and sleep, meditation and physical activity.

Additionally, many participants agreed that their involvement in extracurricular activities helped them to cope with the stresses of the CSEC preparation. One participant explained that his involvement in the extracurricular helped him to cope: “when I go to the gym and I exercise, it takes my mind off the CXC; it clears my mind. So, when I resume, I am fresh, my mind is clear, and I can focus better.” Another participant

explained how deejaying provided stress relief. “I get these gigs and I go out and play my music. This is good for me; I feel good for that moment. That’s important to me.”

Many of the students reported that because of all the negativity and the heavy demands that come at them almost constantly, they are forced to block out. One participant said “my mom was always on my case, I had to just block her out. Another participant had a similar response who shared “I blocked out the things that stressed me.”

All Participants reported that they were sensitive to the stress experienced by others and the “vibes” they gave off. One female participant for example shared, “my aunt was impatient and got frustrated, then I’d get frustrated and stressed because of it.” Yet another participant shared, “even if you are not stressing, the fact that everyone else is, makes it difficult for you not to stress. CSEC is just too stressful. It’s awful.”

Table 10

Theme 9: Stress and Coping

Sub-themes	Sample Participant Responses
CSEC is stressful	<p>CXC was a major stressor.</p> <p>The uncertainty of CSEC is stressful. You never know what you will be tested on.</p> <p>They make you feel that without CXCs you are nothing.</p> <p>CXC is tough. It’s a lot of work. The SBA was toughest, having to get all the information and put it together.</p>

	Study, study study, then you get yourself stressed out and depressed.
Impact of stress	<p>I just was not making the connection in my head.</p> <p>Some of my friends threw up.</p> <p>When I'm stressed, I cannot focus, and things done make sense when I read.</p> <p>My brain hurts. My eyes water.</p>
Stressors	<p>My SBA was my major stress; caused me to feel very anxious.</p> <p>Teachers did not manage their syllabuses well, so we had to rush and that was stressful.</p> <p>Everyone wants you to get a Grade 1 and they don't know the pressure they are putting you under.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Table continues)</i></p> <p>There was a lot of adolescent stuff... boys, acceptance...that was stress too.</p>
Coping strategies	<p>I knew that I do not work well under stress. So, I chill.</p> <p>I blocked out some of the things that stressed me...including my mom.</p> <p>I had daily affirmations that I put on my mirror and repeat every morning.</p> <p>I had my DJ gig. That helped me lot.</p>

Theme 10: Challenges

The question “what might you consider to be some readiness challenges and concerns you had as you prepared for the CSEC” yielded a variety of answers. The biggest challenge was stress. As seen earlier stress was a major issue and so all the participants identified it as a major challenge. This stress came from the nature of the exams itself, from teachers, from the school, from parents and from friends. Further one participant shared why stress is problematic. He explained that “when I’m stressed, nothing makes sense, like the words going into my brain, but they are not connecting”. The next major issue was the hectic schedule that students are forced to pursue at this time. One participant recalled “my whole day was consumed by the CSEC preparation with little time for anything else...it was school, then after-class lessons, then came home and studied again.” Another student said, “I’m just overwhelmed.” The hectic schedule was contributory to the stress participants say they experienced as well.

Another set of challenges pertained to teachers and teaching. Many students found teachers’ teaching styles and their ability to teach problematic. One student offered “I learn best when someone teaches me, I listen, and I understand. When my teacher cannot teach or makes it difficult for me to understand, then I have a BIG problem”. Another student shared that for “CXC there is just too much work, I feel overwhelmed all the time”.

Peer pressure was another challenge that was identified. One participant was ambivalent about the impact of friends:

My friends were helpful in many ways, but they were a challenge too. Some of my friends were always studying, and then they would ask” what were you doing last night? It made me feel anxious when I was not killing myself like they were. But I was just relaxing, going about it my own way. But when they kept asking, I began to doubt whether my way was the right way
(Participant 4)

Many of the participants recalled how their friends, especially those who were not themselves doing CSEC exerted pressure on them. “They were mostly on social media and on the phone, that that steals away time from study, some of my friend also were into the partying.” There was a lot of distraction.

Additionally, participants were aware that some of the challenges that they faced came from themselves. Reading challenges and poor research skills were problematic. One participant shared “a major challenge for me was gathering information. I am not a book person. I do not like to read. I have no interest in reading, so that made it hard for me. You have to read to study.” Another challenge to “get interested in subjects that you don’t like or have an interest in. Interest is important and if you have no interest it makes it difficult to study.” Discipline and time management skills were also identified as challenges. (See Table 11)

Table 11

Theme 10: Challenges

Sub-themes	Sample Participant Responses
Hectic schedules	There is just too much work.
Teachers	<p>I had too many things to do...</p> <p>The SBA. Teachers did not teach how to do the SBA.</p> <p>Lack of understanding due to teachers' poor preparation.</p>
Personal	<p>I'm a dancer and spent a lot of time dancing. Time management was a challenge. It also meant that I had a hectic schedule.</p>
Peers	<p>Distractions from technology</p> <p>My friends were a problem They had social events and I feel guilty as I could be studying.</p>
Family	<p>Friends stress a lot and that is catching</p> <p>My dad was not in my life and I was sad and depressed and did not want to study</p> <p>My home was confusion. It has a cold environment. Not a relaxed one.</p> <p>My aunt's impatience was a challenge. When she gets like that is throws me off. Getting proper food was a challenge. My mother died and so I was not getting proper food.</p>
	<i>(Table continues)</i>
	<p>There was lots of movement and stress and I could not study.</p>

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness roughly embodies ideas of reliability and validity that are associated with quantitative research. While it does not exactly align to them however, it serves similar role in establishing the worth of qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness encompasses (a) credibility, the degree of truth in the findings, (b) transferability, the extent to which the findings are applicable in other contexts, (c) dependability, the extent to which the findings are replicable, and (d) confirmability, the extent to which the findings are derived from the data. Given the iterative nature of qualitative research, these criteria while singularly important, support each other to strengthen the trustworthiness of qualitative research. As such the strategies that are used to achieve trustworthiness often address several criteria. For this study, the strategies that I used to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings include bracketing, the reflective journal, member checking, and thick rich description.

Bracketing

Bracketing is intended to erect a shield around the phenomenon such that outside forces do not interfere with its discernment. For this study, I bracketed myself during stages of data collection, and analysis so as not to impose myself on the explication of phenomenon. Bracketing will expressly contribute to the credibility and the confirmability of the findings.

Reflective Journal

The reflective journal (Groenewald, 2004), while it is a good data analysis tool, it is also a good tool of the ensuring trustworthiness. Here, it allows the researcher to be mindful of process and so contributes to the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Member Checking

Member checking involves seeking validation of data from individuals who originally provided them. For this study therefore, the participants looked at the field notes at the end of the interview and later received copy of their interview transcripts. This provided them the opportunity to validate the data as reflecting their perspectives relating to the phenomenon under study. Member checking establishes credibility and truthfulness (Harper & Cole, 2012)

Thick Rich Descriptions

Thick rich descriptions refer to the comprehensive and detailed description of the phenomenon such that one can evaluate its usefulness in other situations or contexts (Creswell, 20013). The quality and detailed interviewing, the reflexive journal and field notes contributed to thick rich description in this study which in turn contribute to the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

Other strategies that I used to ensure trustworthiness included my careful attention to detail in describing the research procedures, an audit trail to allow for replication of the study, as well as maximum variation sampling that takes into consideration the diversity that exists in the population. It is however important to bear in mind Lincoln and Guba's (1985) contention that for qualitative research, trustworthiness may never be

totally achieved, given the constructivist notion of how knowledge is constructed.

Notwithstanding this however, I paid attention to these criteria of trustworthiness as I worked within the research process. (See Table 12)

Table 12

Establishing Trustworthiness

Criteria	Strategy
Credibility	Bracketing
	Reflexive Journal
	Member checking
Transferability	Thick rich descriptions
	Purposive sampling
Dependability	Reflexive Journal
	Audit trail
Confirmability	Bracketing
	Audit trail

Summary

The two research questions that drove this phenomenological inquiry sought to describe the essence of the phenomenon of readiness for the CSEC Exam. Together they sought to capture the interplay of readiness factors at and between the different levels. While Question 1. explored factors at the individual level, Question 2 explored factors at the other levels. From the data, it is seen that at the individual level, physiological, cognitive, affective and behavioral factors are critical inputs with respect to students

experience of readiness. Parental, teacher and school, peers, and cultural factors operate on the individual to influence the personal inputs already mentioned.

Chapter 5 further explores the interplay of these factors using the social0ecological model. Here, the factors operating at the different levels and the interplay between them will be fully explored and illuminated.

Chapter 5

The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Exam, or the CSEC Exam as it is commonly called, marks the end of secondary school tenure for Antigua and Barbudan students. More importantly though, it is a life defining exam, as successful negotiation increases the prospects for a successful life for the nation's youth. As such, this exam is very important not only for students but also for their families as their children's success has implications for their socioeconomic status and family stability. Additionally, successful negotiation of the exam contributes to the strengthening of the country's human capital and this in turn has profound implications for its economy. It is little wonder then, that readiness for this exam is a major national concern since it is an antecedent to successful negotiation of the exam.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and to describe the experiences of readiness for Antiguan and Barbudan students as they prepared for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Exam, the CSEC. For purposes of this study, readiness is conceived to be a multidimensional construct, involving complex processes, operating simultaneously at different levels. The research questions, therefore, were geared to capture the interplay of readiness factors at and between these different levels.

Summary of Findings

From the findings it is seen that readiness is both as process and state. As a process readiness involves many inputs from different levels. At the individual level, readiness involves physiological, cognitive, affective and behavioral inputs. Parental,

teacher and school, peers, and cultural factors operate on the individual to influence the personal inputs already mentioned.

Interpretation

Social-ecological theory

The social ecological system model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) served as the conceptual framework for this study. According to Bronfenbrenner, the individual exists in an environment of nested spheres and each of these bears on the other in a way that they contribute individually and collectively to the development and the experiences of the individual. At its most basic level, the individual, located at the epicenter, exists in the context of the family and school, which exist within the community, which itself is nestled within the greater social, cultural, economic and political and geo-political context. Applied to the research context then the model illuminates the symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between the learner and the environment.

Given this framework, readiness can be viewed as a function of interlocking systems of relationships, structures, role, supports, values, and so on. At its most basic level, it is a positive experience or state that is supportive of learning and transmission of skills and values. Further to as seen by Dobinson-Harrington (2006), in their exploration of the tutor-tutee relationship and the processes involved in the transference of skills, readiness is a function of supportive encounters. Readiness, then, is the extent to which one is willing to enter and participate, such that knowledge and skills are transferred and acquired (Holton Bates, & Ruona, 2000). The processes, relationships, roles, values,

interactions, and expectations, in the social environment then dictate the readiness experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989; 2005).

The Social-ecological model then, a multidimensional model, was chosen to explore the phenomenon of readiness, itself a multidimensional construct. It allows for an exploration of the inter and intra relatedness of the elements that constitute students' experiences of readiness for the CSEC Exam.

At the heart of the model is the student. The student's attributes, and cognitive and affective processes are some of the primary elements of the readiness process (Figure1). For example, the student's sense of their own ability to successfully negotiate the CSEC moderates their experience of readiness: Self-efficacy affects their motivation and their approach to the Exam preparation; however, self-efficacy is impacted by inputs from elements operating at the higher levels. The teacher for example, has a powerful influence on students' self-efficacy. The teacher's ability to teach, students' perception of such, as well as the teacher's emotional response to students impact how receptive students themselves are teaching inputs. Once the student is receptive, he or she will engage with the learning-teaching process in such a way as to boost his or her self-efficacy. This underscores the synergistic and iterative nature of the input variables at and between the various levels of the system.

Parents, teachers, and peers, situated at the micro level, are of proximal importance with respect to their impact on the students' readiness experience. The closer and tighter the relationship with students, the greater their influence. In general, these relationships determine the extent to which students feel valued and efficacious.

However, good relationships particularly good relationships with significant adults, allow for easy transference of values, and make it easy for students to be guided, to be coached, and to cope with the stresses of the readiness process. In fact, the relationship that students have with these significant others can themselves be a source of great stress, and these then can prove to be counterproductive. Here, the adult becomes become distant, and at the same time the stress the student feels as a result has a negative impact on and characterizes their readiness experience.

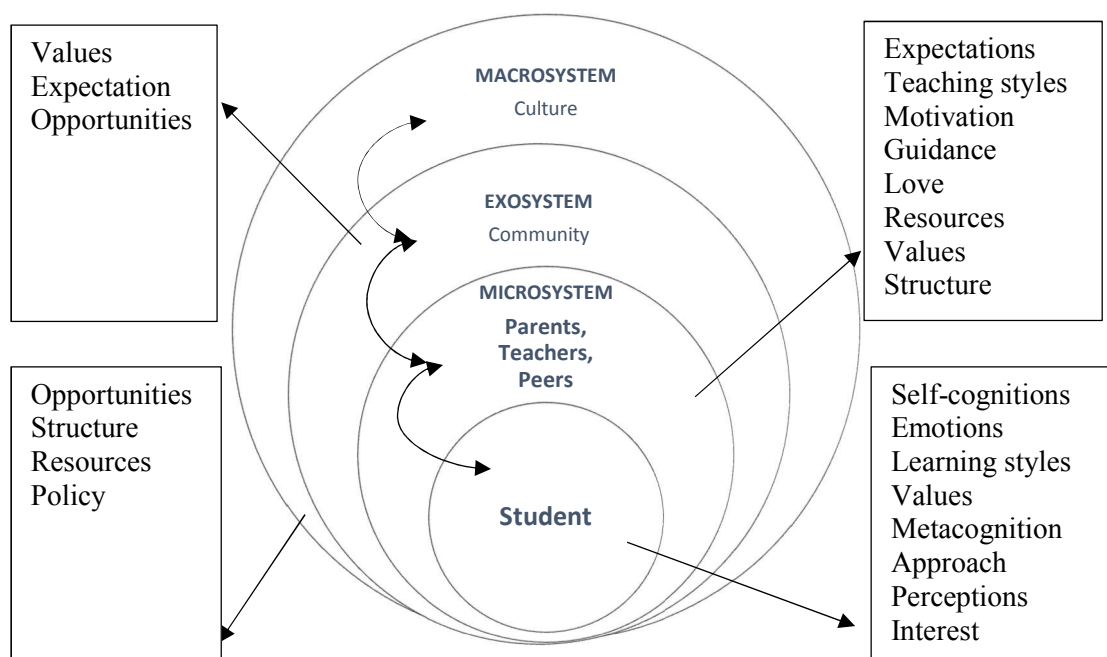


Figure 2. Socio-ecological model of students' readiness experience. Level inputs that are significantly determine students' CSEC readiness experience.

The input factors at this level include expectations, guidance, love, structure, and resources. It is important to note too that the extent to which these are fed down into the

student at the epicenter, depends on many micro-level variables. One such variable is expectancy. For example, if expectancy is high, if parents and teachers expect a good outcome, they tend to provide more support to students. Support to students can be in the form of the provision of extra classes or tutorial opportunities, more structure, more learning and study support tools, and more encouragement and positive involvement. Conversely, if expectancy is low, parents and teachers tend not to “put out themselves” as much. Sometimes this low expectancy can be the driver of students’ motivation, but often it is a deflator. Further to, students resign themselves to believing that their efforts won’t matter, in a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy loop. As such, they either disengage from the exam preparation process or engage in sabotaging behaviours with deleterious consequences for their readiness for the CSEC Exam.

Other variables at the micro level that determine the extent to which critical support inputs are fed down to the student level, include a sense of resourcefulness, students’ perception of how important they are to parents and teachers, and financial stability of families. It is also important to note here that the parents, teachers, and peers also have increased impact if their efforts are synergized.

While the individual inputs of persons at the microlevel are important, the inputs from sub-systems at this level are also of critical importance. Micro-level system inputs such as structure, norms, values, and opportunities translate into schools and homes being enabling or facilitative environments or sabotaging environments and so impact individual inputs. Teachers, for example, will be adversely or positively impacted by the nature of school environment; and this will then determine the kinds of inputs that they

feed down to the student. Additionally, the student also operates in the school environment, and will be impacted by it as well. Hence, the school has an impact on students both directly and indirectly.

Schools and families exist in a greater system, the exosystem. In the context of students' CSEC readiness, this system comprises, the education system and the Ministry of Education, and Community neighborhoods. The inputs from this level include, structure, national development and educational policies, opportunities, and value which influence the dynamics at the microsystem level and indirectly impact students at the epicenter.

Further to, the education system and the Ministry of Education along with neighborhoods are impacted by forces coming at them from the macrosystem level. Political imperatives and policies, social norms and culture, and the economy form the context for the operation of the other systems both directly and indirectly. Even students at the most basic level feel the impact of the macrosystem. For example, economic and political considerations may dictate the deployment of teachers and resources that are available to them. These then have a direct impact on teacher inputs, such as teacher resourcefulness, which in turn impact students' inputs such as self-efficacy and interest in a subject or course. All these being direct inputs into the readiness experience.

It must be borne in mind too that the macrosystem operates in a super system of geopolitical and international trading and economic agreements. For small developing nations such as Antigua and Barbuda, these have huge impact on the political, economic

and social realities of the people, and as such, their impact on how students experience readiness for the CSEC Exam cannot be overlooked.

The Readiness Circle

It is clear from the data, that students' experience of readiness for the CSEC Exam is primarily a function of the inputs of many individuals and the degree of their impact is a function of their distance to and relationship with students. So, at its most basic, any individual who connects to students in a positive way can be of tremendous benefit to their readiness experience. However, some individuals by dint of who they are and where they are situated in relation to the students and their academic and psychological development, play a more critical role. These include parents, teachers, peers or friends, coaches, youth leaders, and pastors along with their church family. These persons operate individually within this circle providing their individual supports to the students. However, when there is synergy between them, and attempts are made to coalesce their inputs around students' readiness, students reap more benefits even from the individual effort/inputs of those in their circle.

Parents are singularly the most important individuals in the readiness circle. First, they are closest to the students. However, apart from this, parents provide structure, guidance, motivation, stability, and the exam readiness-related resources that students need. Second, it became clear too that parents' attention to the basic and physical needs of the students is an important input. Attention to nutrition, and clean and comfortable home environment are often taken for granted especially at this level and for teenagers.

However, the participants noted the impact of nutritious food on their ability to focus and underscored the importance of parents in making the necessary provision either through food or supplementation. Parents are also important for helping to coordinate the input of the other individuals in the circle and helping the students to reach out beyond their circle to co-opt others.

The energy and attitudes that parents bring into the circle do not only determine and characterize the energy within the circle, but they also impact the pace at which readiness takes place. If parents are calm and focused, students tend to be better adjusted to the demands of the process, more engaged in the process, and are better able to cope with the rigors of the preparation. Conversely, parents' anxiety makes it more difficult for the students to prepare. For example, participants reported how the "anxiousness" of their parents make them uncomfortable to the point where they do not like to be around them or to be at home. Additionally, parental anxiety gets transferred to the students and compound the stress that they experience. Stress undermines students' resourcefulness and hence it negatively impacts their readiness experience; and, in the end, it also undermines their sense of readiness for the Exam.

Teacher inputs seem to have the greatest impact on students' self-efficacy. These inputs include guidance, consistent feedback, relationship, accessibility, engaging teaching style, teacher preparedness and knowledge, and love and concern. When teachers consistently provide these to the students, they tend to better avail themselves of the learning process and "understand better", and as such their self-efficacy improves. Students then feel better about their chances of doing well for the Exam. This heightened

sense of expectancy and self-efficacy then improves their motivation causing them to engage in a series of facilitative behaviours. These facilitative behaviours include, studying, asking questions in and out of the classroom, seeking out the teacher to ask for help, and staying on task particularly as it pertains the school-based assessment (SBA).

It is important to note here that the above teacher inputs are contingent upon the teachers' sense of their own self-efficacy. Their self-efficacy impacts their teaching style and classroom management and in a very real way contributes to their own level of stress and anxiety. It is interesting that students seem to be aware of these teacher factors and understand their impact on their ability to learning, and on their own stress and anxiety associated with preparing for the Exam.

Further to, students expect teachers to be consistent, to be prepared, to be responsive, to treat students equally, to demonstrate love for the subjects/courses they teach, to demonstrate concern about their progress, and to manage their own "emotional stuff". Therefore, when students perceive otherwise, teachers lose their power to positively contribute to the readiness experience. For example, students may disengage, they may skip classes, find it difficult to focus, lose interest in the subject/course and become tardy with respect to presenting assignments.

Peers/friends constitute an important component of the readiness circle, and their importance magnifies when teacher and parent inputs are weak. Therefore, students who seem to benefit most from peer support are students with weak and inconsistent parental support and those who seem to be outside the reach of the teacher. Peers provide academic support, and emotional support as well as serve a development referent.

Friends offer several academic support inputs, all geared toward helping students improve their knowledge base and gain the requisite skills. Of all these inputs, the study group is considered the most important. Study groups allow students to consolidate new learning and to fill in the gaps in their learning. This is because teachers work under tight time constraints with respect to covering their respective CSEC syllabus. As such, many students feel rushed and may find it difficult to understand the concepts taught. The study group then, allows students to come together and teach each other in a way that they understand. It helps them to benefit from the varying perspectives of diverse learners, hence contributing to a greater understanding of a topic. In addition to augmenting the effort of the teacher, study groups also force students into a study mode, and so many students find this valuable as they find it difficult to study on their own. The study group also provides opportunities for students to test their skills and knowledge and receive valuable and timely feedback.

Students also benefit from intense one on one support from their peers. This comes particularly in the form of peer tutoring. Peer tutoring allows for strong students, the tutors, to help weak students, the tutees, to learn skills or understand concepts, that they did not master in class. Students use the same language and the peer-tutors seem to be better able to “teach” in more student-friendly ways. Additionally, it seems that the more relaxed, less threatening atmosphere of the tutor-tutee arrangement, makes it easier for tutees to ask questions and to seek clarification, thereby adding to their increased understanding of the subject matter. It is also important to note that the tutors also benefit from assisting weak students. In preparing to help weak students, tutors must first seek to

understand and prepare to impart. This not only reinforces what they already know, but it also builds their confidence and self-efficacy.

Other supports that peers provide that help to determine the nature of students' CSEC readiness experience include opportunities for feedback and assessment, emotional support and stress relief, and social comparison. Peers provide almost constant feedback to each other with respect to how they are doing in a course. They test each other, and their performance provides information as to how well they are doing. Students then use this information as a measure as to their own progress as well as to the kind of effort they need to expend. This social comparison function of the peer group serves students well especially if they find themselves in a group of well-motivated and high performing friends; however, if their friends are struggling, are not focused or task-oriented, they too may find it just as difficult to focus, and are more likely to struggle in their studies. A peer group of struggling friends then, negatively contributes to the readiness experience.

Peers can be a source of stress for each other though. Students by their action or inaction can contribute to the stress that they feel individually and collectively. Students may choose to procrastinate, or at the other extreme, they may be overly absorbed by the CSEC preparation, creating anxiety amongst their peers. Students who procrastinate will eventually realize that the exam is fast approaching and may then make demands on their friends for time and support. Overly absorbed students on the other hand seem to be always on the go, and other students either feel the need to keep up or feel guilty if they do not. Students may also feel pressured into "not taking this exam thing too serious", out of fear as being perceived to be not cool, or to be too 'bookie'.

In addition to parents, teachers and peers, the readiness circle as shown in Figure 3, includes others such as other significant adults including adult family members and God parents, coaches, mentors, church leaders, and youth group leaders. These individuals may provide academic support; however, their strongest inputs are emotional and moral support. As seen therefore students benefit tremendously from strong supportive relationship outside of the academic realm. Through these relationship students receive much needed encouragement, motivation, perspective shaping, love, comfort, and a listening ear. In addition, these individuals often provide opportunities for students to be involved in non-academic activities, that develop skills that transfer into the academics.

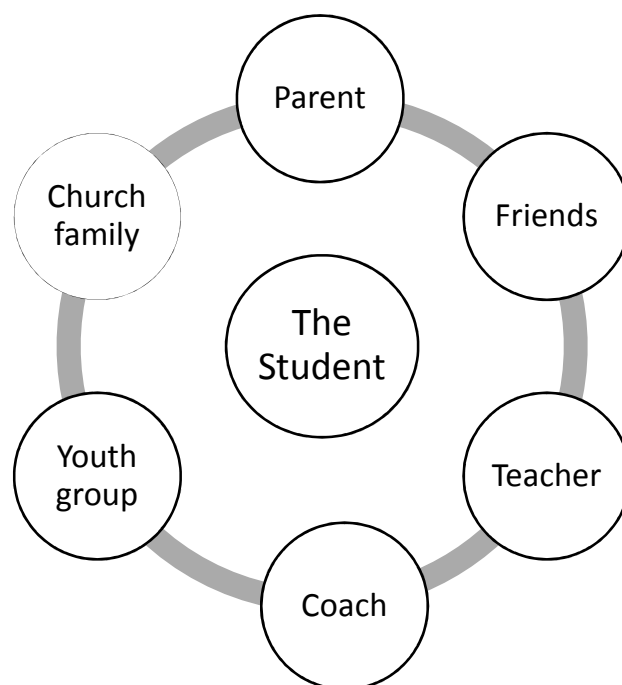


Figure 3. The Readiness Circle. Individuals in this circle are important to students, but impact on student readiness experience is greater when there is collaboration with groups and between groups.

The inputs provided assist in bolstering self-esteem, in strengthening self-efficacy and in instilling confidence in students.

The Confidence Loop

Confidence has been identified as critical to the readiness experience. Confidence connotes a trust in one's own powers and abilities. From the data, a confidence loop has been identified, where it has shown that three major components contribute to students' confidence. These are interest, ownership, and self-efficacy (Figure 4).

In the context of readiness for the CSEC Exam, *interest* means that students are taken up with, are curious about, and use time and energy to seek after knowledge in a subject. Interest is not static nor is it present in all students at the same level. So, how does one develop interest? Many students may come into the classroom with a 'natural' interest in a subject; perhaps because of familial influence or past positive experience with the subject such as good performance in the lower grades. However, from the data the strongest antecedent of student interest seems to be teacher variables. Teachers' ability to teach, their own love for the subjects they teach, and their interest in their students' wellbeing and progress determine to a large extent students' interest in the subjects that they teach. Additionally, expectancy also seems to drive student interest. When students believe that they stand a chance in passing a subject at CSEC, they are likely to be more interested in it. The reverse is also true.

Interest then drives a kind of lower order confidence that allows the students to shift from passive learner to active learner, taking a more genuine and active role in their

CSEC preparation. This is the ownership phase. Here, students take personal responsibility for preparing for the CSEC, understanding that their effort is precursory to the outcome that they desire. Once students take ownership, they engage in a set of behaviours that are facilitative of the outcome they expect. The more they engage in the process of readiness, the more their confidence grows into a kind of a higher-level confidence. As they engage more and more in the readiness process, they become more knowledgeable, develop more skills, and their self-efficacy strengthens. This self-efficacy again allows them to engage more on the process of readiness. Strengthened self-efficacy then increases interest.

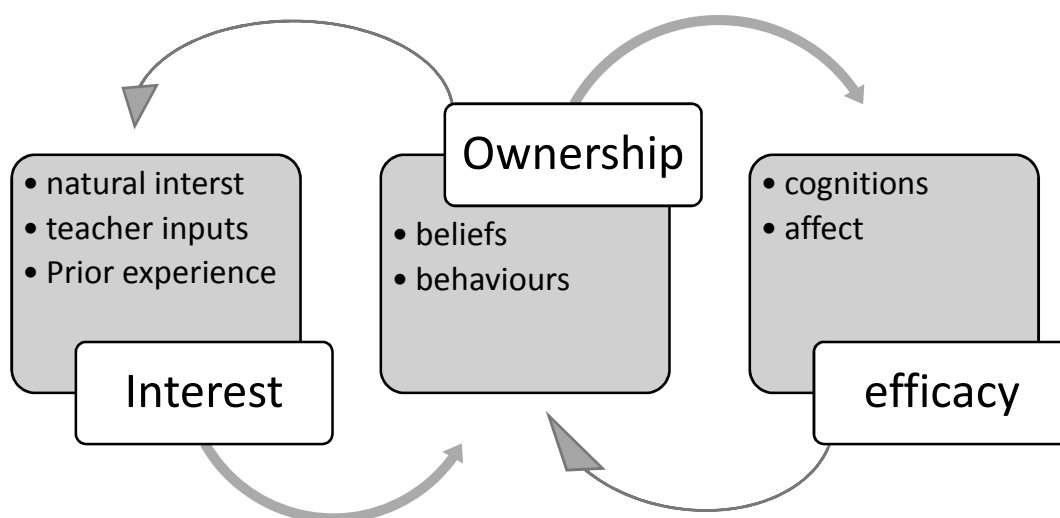


Fig. 4. The Confidence Loop. Confidence: A function of ownership, interest, and efficacy

Being Ready versus Not being Ready

At the very least, readiness is associated with getting prepared to undertake a task, or activity. In the context of the CSEC Exam, it involves all the things students and other do to get them to a point where they can successfully negotiate the Exam. The assumption is, the greater the level of readiness, the greater their chances of doing well for the Exam. This study then seeks to illuminate that experience: What constitute that experience of readiness and how is readiness qualitatively different from that of “not ready”?

The Readiness Experience: A Process

Readiness is an iterative and incremental process. It happens over time as a result of the collective and individual inputs of several individuals in the readiness circle. The “speed” of the process is a function of the synergy and interplay of many forces working at and between many levels. In the end though, these coalesce at the level of the individual, translating into a real, and dynamic experience of readiness.

Once students get into their final year of secondary school, their readiness for the CSEC Exam and their successful negotiation of the Exam take centre stage. These become the motivation for, and dictate the kinds of support provided by schools, teachers, and their parents. Schools may schedule into the school day extra classroom time, arrange tutorials or extra classes for subjects, and provide timelines for the submission of critical components of the CSEC, particularly the school-based assessment

(SBA). Teachers provide more intense teaching, offer more extra classes, and provide more one on one support; and parents generally provide more opportunities for their children to study and to grasp the concepts. These supports range for the provision of tutors and extra classes, relieving them for chores, and creating an enabling home environment. It is important to know too that the provision of these supports depended on the level of expectancy relative to students' chances of doing well on the Exam. As such, students experience varying levels of inputs from school, teachers, and parents.

Given the intensity of the Fifth Form CSEC agenda, and anxiety that attends the CSEC preparation, it is little wonder that students are hypersensitive to the attitudes of their teachers and parents with respect to their expectancy relative to their chances of success on the CSEC. This then gives students some of their earliest information that shapes their own expectancy about their own chances, and so provide early fuel for their own efforts to get ready.

The confidence loop described in Figure 4 provides a tool for understanding the journey of the student throughout the readiness process. Student variables such as interest, expectancy, and perception of support from significant others, determine how students orient themselves to the task ahead. A focused approach involves a commitment to stay on task. Students develop schedules or study routines and by and large stay on task. This disciplined approach to studying, results over time in students mastering the material, and building efficacy and confidence.

Specifically, students benefit from opportunities to practice completing test questions from past CSEC Exam papers and receiving feedback. The ease with which

they can answer these questions, their performance, and feedback from teachers and peers, provide valuable information that allows them to gauge their own readiness. An increased sense of readiness translates into students being more willing to offer more support to their peers. As a result, they tend to be more active in study groups, ask more questions in class, and offer more one on one support for their friends. This in turn translates into an increasing sense of their own mastery of the course material, an increased self-efficacy, and confidence. It is important to note here too, that as students display increased mastery, they exact more support from others in their readiness circle. This underscores the iterative and synergistic nature of the elements in the readiness system.

The level of readiness is determined by students' willingness to be actively engaged. The readiness process is therefore an active one, and how students engage determines the stress that they experience. It is important to note here, that CSEC is inherently stressful. Increased workload, uncertainty about the nature of the exam, and concerns about their knowledge, are some of the stressors. Students, through a process of transference, also experience the anxiety of teachers, peers and parents, which increases their own levels of stress. So, it is safe to say that most students experience stress which is debilitating. Even students who have a disciplined approach to readying themselves experience stress. Students who experience the least amount of stress are those who consciously decided to take a relaxed approach and work into their schedules, relaxation and "me" time. From all reports, stress interferes with cognition so that important faculties such as memory, thinking, and attention/focus that are needed in the readiness

process are compromised. Students who pursued a relaxed approach therefore experienced clarity of thinking, improved memory and sharpened focus. These allowed them to pursue mastery of the course material which translated into increased self-efficacy and confidence.

The Readiness Experience: A State

Readiness is not only experienced as a process, a gradual improvement in one's sense of preparedness, but also as a state of being. This state is the product of the process of readiness. Further to, this state of readiness constitutes a set of cognitions, self-processes, and emotions, that make it qualitatively different to its opposite. Cognitions include attributions, locus of control, memory, reasoning, and metacognition. For example, when students are ready, they are better able to see a direct link between their effort and the results they get; they then use the feedback that they receive to improve their effort. Additionally, they are also able to make connection between new information and the old knowledge and can use appropriate retrieval cues to draw out learned information. It is also interesting to note that students who reported that they felt they ready for the CSEC Exam, also felt more in tune with how they learn and understood what they needed to improve their understanding. These students also reported that they were aware of what was happening in their body and in their head and that they were aware of what they knew and what they did not know. The above cognitions and self-processes were accompanied by a related set of emotions to include confidence, calm, excitement.

This state of readiness also translated into a set of behaviours that proved beneficial to the individual student, as well as their peers. Students experiencing this state of readiness, ask more questions, are more strategic in their approach to studying, reach out for help more, but they also know when they no longer need external help, and provide support and assistance to peers.

Not Ready

Just as it is important to illuminate what it means to be ready, it is similarly important to understand how students experience “being not ready” for the CSEC Exam. First, the lack of synergy between member in the readiness circle or lack of commitment to the student readiness process on the part of significant persons in the readiness circle contribute significantly to their experience of not being ready. Second, limited access to resources or support limit the rate at which students grasp concepts and practice skills, and if this continues, it leads to them feeling unprepared. It is important to note too, that the longer students are without resources, the more debilitating its impact on their readiness. Students often give up, resign themselves to failing the subject, or withdraw from the process in general. Third, there is an accompanying set of cognitions and emotions that contrast sharply to those experienced when a student feels ready. These include mental confusion, the inability to remember and make linkages, and a general sense of overwhelm and anxiety. The students feel stuck and inadvertently engage in a set of sabotaging behaviours. It is also important to note that these students even those that need the most from others in the readiness circle, exact the least. This may be the result of lower expectancy with respect to their chances of doing well for the exam. However,

these students may also evoke emotions of helplessness and hopelessness in other individuals in the readiness circle, who respond by distancing and withholding support.

Readiness: Composite or Unitary

The fact that for the CSEC Exams students are assessed on several individual subjects, raises the issue as to whether they experience readiness as unitary, or as a composite of the readiness levels for individual subjects. For the CSEC Exam students take minimum of 8 subjects, however, a few students have taken as many as 22 subjects. Apart from English Language (English A) and mathematics that are compulsory, the subjects that student write for the CSEC, were selected on a basis of teacher assessment. Generally, though, students tend to take the subjects that they like, or subjects that align with their career goals. Their interest in the subject and an awareness that they need the subject to pursue higher education with respect to their career goals translate into increase the likelihood that they pass the teacher's assessment. These are the subjects that they will be examined on at the CSEC.

So, students are tasked with the responsibility of preparing to take a given number of subjects at CSEC. Based on several factors including their individual interest, teacher preparation and their ability to teach, and a variety of supports from individuals in the readiness circle, students experience differential readiness for the subjects they take to the CSEC. For example, many students report lack of readiness to sit the mathematics exam. This is due to the poor math-efficacy and low expectancy, their previous experience with and performance in math, and the opportunities they have for extra lessons. In contrast, students reported high level of readiness for subjects that they like and in those they

believe they can pass, and they receive extra help in. As such it is established that students also experience varying levels of readiness for the subjects that they will take at the CSEC.

Considering this therefore, what role does individual subject readiness play on the overall experience of readiness for the CSEC Exam? There seems to be a cumulative effect: the readier students feel for the greater number of subjects, the greater their overall experience of readiness. Additionally, readiness for the subjects that students like, or for the subjects that are considered important for whatever reason, seems to have a disproportional effect on the overall experience of readiness. So, for example, if the student loves math or requires math to pursue an engineering degree, their readiness experience for math, would have great impact on their overall readiness experience over and above the other subject. This math readiness can also impact the student's readiness experience for the subjects. This is because the self-efficacy and confidence that the student experiences for math can transfer to other subjects, with the attending behaviours associated with acquisition of knowledge and mastery of skills.

Readiness Challenges

Students experience many challenges as they ready themselves for the CSEC Exam. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges is stress. Students encounter a myriad of stressors as they prepare for CSEC, it is little wonder therefore that stress characterizes their CSEC readiness experience. These stressors include hectic work schedule, the uncertainty of the CSEC exam, the SBA, lack of resources and support, cultural pressure, and teacher and

parent attitude. While students have different kinds of stressors, however, the stress they experience impact them in basically the same way.

Generally, stress is a physiological response to perceived problems and challenges, called stressors. Stress really is the body's attempt to cope with the onslaught of stressors. However, in a stressed state, the body releases chemicals that compromise important psychological functioning. Moreover, students preparing for the CSEC Exam are likely to experience many of the harmful physical and cognitive effects of stress. Physically, they may experience increased heart pounding, inability to sleep, overeating, or inability to sleep, headaches, body aches, and night tremors. Further, because the body is physically taxed, students may be fidgety and tired, and so find it difficult to stay focused and on-task. Cognitively, students may experience mental confusion, anxiety, lack of focus, impaired memory, self-doubt, and an inability to make connections between old and new learning. From the data, participants reported that they experienced negative impact of stress. It can be surmised, therefore, that stress has a deleterious effect on the readiness process.

Other challenges include: Lack of opportunity to build mastery and lack of critical resources. Given the dynamics of the classroom, teaching style and teacher preparedness, and their own ability to grasp concepts, students often have need for extra support beyond the classroom. However, many students, because of financial constraints of their families, are not able to access critical resources and supports such as tutoring, extra classes or the study guides, and past papers. These students, then, are not able to get the extra help they need to practice skills and build their understanding of the course

material. Additionally, they also tend to feel deficient when they compare themselves to their peers who have these resources, and this can be a major source of stress which further undermine their effort to get ready for the Exam.

For most students, and in general, teachers provide adequate support to facilitate their readiness for the CSEC Exam. However, where they do not, their lack of support has a huge negative impact on student's experience of readiness. It is important to note that teacher's disengagement with students, their lack of genuine concern, teacher absenteeism, and teachers' inability to teach, were experienced by students as negative inputs. These negative inputs further undermine students' interest in the subject which inadvertently retard the development of their self-efficacy of an individual subject.

Another challenge relates to the nature of the CSEC programme itself. It is fast-paced and so very demanding. Teachers rush to complete syllabuses, while students struggle to keep up with the course work, and to complete their SBAs. This often requires that classes are extended beyond the normal school day and in addition, students seek extra classes beyond school. This translates into long days and hectic schedules for many students which leave many of them feeling stressed and burned out. Managing all the things that they must do in their CSC preparation, becomes a major challenge for many a student.

Limitations

Participants sat the CSEC Exam in June 2017, however the data collection took place in November and December 2017. The study then required participants to reflect on and to recall their experience as they prepared for this exam. Given that participants

were asked to recall their memories of the phenomenon of interest, the accuracy of their memories, or their openness to report their memories are limitations of the study.

Further, both hindsight and self-serving biases could have affected how students recalled and reported their readiness experiences.

Recommendations

All the participants agreed that the CSEC Exam is a very important undertaking as it “determines the rest of our lives” (Participant). As such they offered very strong recommendations for inputs and supports at the various levels that they believe would assist other students to better prepare for the CSEC.

Support of Students

As stress is a major issue for students preparing for the CSEC, participants believed that no effort should be spared to assist students to manage stress effectively. The following were their recommendations:

1. *Guidance counseling sessions.* All students should have scheduled sessions with guidance counselors. These guidance counseling sessions will allow students the space and the opportunity to talk about the things that bother them and to help them gain perspective. Participants were cognizant of the many stressors that depleted their mental resources and believed that guidance counselors could provide students with information, resources and skills/tools needed to navigate the CSEC Exam preparation stage
2. *Academic advisors/coach.* Participants agreed that preparation for the CSEC, although intense for the few months leading up to the Exam, is really a school

long process (i.e. 5 years). They also agreed that students need to understand how they learn and should be guided to optimize their own learning styles. As such academic coaches and advisors can be employed in the secondary school system to provide the requisite support. These can include things like helping students to understand how they learn and to explore and to capitalize on their learning styles, set learning goals, and develop learner-support skills and networks.

3. *Motivational sessions to prepare students:* Some students recalled how helpful motivations talks were. They value the “talks” by teachers and by professionals invited to talk to them in class or during general assembly, or the motivational session at church, or in their youth group. As such, they highly recommend that motivational talks be a feature of the fifth form year for all students. These motivational talks will not only provide a needed boost, but they will also provide perspective, help to allay fears, sharpen focus, as well as to present an exemplar of triumph especially if the motivators were carefully selected.

Extracurricular Activities

CSEC Exam preparation is very stressful. Many students are totally engaged in exam preparation practically for all their waking hours. This along with cultural, familial, and school pressure, contribute to students feeling not only stressed but also overwhelmed. Some participants have structured in “down time” by being involved in extracurricular activities. These students were the ones who reported that they felt more in control, and that they felt less stressed. These students also reported experiences of “clear thinking’ and relaxation. Students preparing for CSEC Exam, therefore, should be

given opportunities to be involved in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities may include physical exercise and sporting activities, or hobby related activities, activities that are not related to their course work. Extracurricular activities allow students to manage stress, provide a cool off period, and to draw on and build social relationships and networks. Additionally, extracurricular activities provide powerful experiences and feelings of success and self-efficacy which students transfer to their CSEC readiness experience.

Increasing Accessibility to Critical Resources

The successful negotiation of the CSEC requires that students are adequately prepared. Adequate preparation requires that student have the requisite resources such as internet, past papers, and study guides Many participants held the view that having access to these were critical to their preparation. One participant expressed doubt as to whether she would have felt prepared had she not had the past papers. The issue is that these resources can be costly and so only students with means are able to purchase them. As such, there is a strong recommendation that the Ministry of Education, through the Education Levy, provides these resources to all students who are preparing for the CSEC Exam.

Proper Deployment of Teachers

Continuity of instruction seems to be a critical factor in student readiness. Participants reported that when teacher are relocated during their final year, they have difficulty adjusting to the new teacher either because of different teaching style, or difficulties making an emotional attachment to the new teacher, both considered by

participants to be critical readiness input variables. Bearing this in mind, therefore, the Ministry of Education and school boards (for private school), should as a matter of policy (as far as is practicable), desist from redeploying fifth form teachers.

Teacher Preparation and Resourceful

Participants reported that teachers' competence and teaching style are important in their own sense of readiness. Some even reported that their lack of readiness or their sense of efficacy were connected to teacher deficits either in the subject area or in their teaching ability. Some also believed that many teachers were not very versed in the CSEC modality or requirements. They believe that it is important to provide special training for teachers to prepare them to successfully deliver to the CSEC standard.

Implications for Social Change

This study seeks to illuminate Antiguan and Barbudan students' experience of readiness as they prepare for a life-defining examination, the CSEC. This study is of tremendous local, national and social import. The local significance comes from the fact that the research seeks to shed light on a phenomenon of cultural relevance in relation to a population that is under-researched, in a sociocultural context that has eluded mainstream research. In a real sense, then, this research will not only add to the body of local knowledge but will contribute to the literature in a way that lends a more panoramic perspective on this psychological construct.

On a more practical side, the findings of this study have provided insights into the dynamics and processes involved in students' exam preparation leading up to their negotiation of the CSEC exam. As such, they could be used by the Ministry of Education

to inform their policies with respect to the provision of support services and programs that students need to adequately prepare for the CSEC. The CSEC Exam in many ways represent a rite of passage for Antiguan youth and the results are life-defining, opening up opportunities for educational employment advances. The results have significant implications for quality of life for the individual youth, the family, the community, and for the economy. The results of the study, then, strengthen the case for more tactical support for students preparing for the CSEC, as well as strengthen the case for exam preparation to be part of the development agenda of the country.

The results have also shed light on some of the cultural and other factors that work antithetically to the successful negotiation of the exams. These results can then provide a point of entry for both national dialogue and intervention. about CSEC preparation and sitting. For example, one of the issues that I hope the results will bring to the fore, is the cultural pressure that attends the CSEC Exam. It is my belief that once the community begins to openly address this, then it will reduce the pressure that students experience. This reduction of stress will positively impact their readiness experience which is expected to have a positive impact on their Exam performance.

Conclusions

The results of the CSEC is a life changer for Antigua and Barbudan youth. Given this reality therefore, their readiness for this exam takes on huge significance. I undertook this study, therefore, to understand and explore students' experience of readiness for the CSEC Exam, to be in a position to inform policy and practice relative to necessary supports. The results support findings in the literature that showed that readiness

happens as a result of the collective effort of others. Hence, this study makes an urgent case for more and stronger student readiness supports.

Considering the social-ecological model, students experience of readiness for the CSEC Exam is understood to be contextual, iterative and organic. It is the result of the dynamic interplay of various inputs of a host of individuals functioning at different levels of the readiness system. Cognitive, affective, technical and physical inputs coalesce at the level of the students. Here, the degree of interest that students have in the subject, their level of expectancy, ownership, confidence, and self-efficacy determine how much they engage in the process of readiness. To a large extent these student inputs as well as the dynamics at and between the various levels impact students in ways that can be facilitative or counterproductive. When students experience these inputs as facilitative, they are more likely to be engaged. However, when these are experienced as negative, or when they are inconsistent, students are more likely to be impacted by the stressors associated with the CSEC preparation, and they are also more likely to disengage from the readiness process.

The data is clear: Students' experience of readiness is qualitatively different from their experience when they are not ready. In fact, students' experience of 'ready' and their experience of 'not ready' are on opposite ends of a continuum. Movement along this continuum depends on the interplay of a variety of inputs. Students, then, can be assisted in their progress on this readiness continuum through the provision of necessary supports in the context of community. At the level of the political directorate and the Ministry of Education, policies are needed to create the facilitative environment as well as to deploy

the necessary resources at school and community level to support student readiness. At lower levels students need more personalized support.

This study explored students' experience of readiness and has in a significant way illuminated the dynamics of this phenomenon. While it was outside the scope of this study, I cannot help but wonder whether the degree of readiness experienced by students, impacted their performance on the CSEC Exam. As such, my final recommendation is that such a study be undertaken. Given the importance of the CSEC, then, this study will have tremendous national and social significance.

References

- Abel, N. (2011). The essence of readiness to practice: An exploration of psychotherapists' subjective experience. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.
- Abraham, R. A., Slate, J. R., Saxon, D. P., & Barnes, W. (2014). Math readiness of Texas Community College developmental education students: A multiyear statewide analysis. *Community College Enterprise*, 20(2), 25-44. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcraft.cc.mi.us/cce/>
- Abraham, R. A., Slate, J. R., Saxon, D. P., & Barnes, W. (2014). College-readiness in Math: A conceptual analysis of the literature. *Research & Teaching in Developmental Education*, 30(2), 4-34. Retrieved from <http://www.nycls.org/index.html>

- Arnold, K. D., Lu, E. C., & Armstrong, K. J. (2011). Meso system: A network of overlapping relationships. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 38(5), 47-57. doi:10.1002/aehe.v38.5
- Arnold, K. D., Lu, E. C., & Armstrong, K. J. (2012). Microsystem: The direct experience of students. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 38(5), 31-46. doi:10.1002/aehe.v38.5
- Arnold, K. D., Lu, E. C., & Armstrong, K. J. (2012). The ecology of college readiness. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 38(5), 91-107. doi:10.1002/aehe.v38.5
- Armenakis, A. A., Harris, S. G., & Mossholder, K. W. (1993). Creating readiness for organizational change. *Human Relations*, 46(6), 681-703. doi: 10.1177/001872679304600601
- Bevan, M. T. (2014). A method of phenomenological interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24(1), 36-144. doi: 10.1177/1049732313519710
- Blom, A., & Hobbs, C. (2007). School and work: Does the Eastern Caribbean education system adequately prepare youth for the global economy? World BANK, Washington, DC. World Bank. Retrieved from <https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/10294> License: CC BY 3.0 Unported.”
- Blom, A., & Hobbs, C. (2008). School and work in the Eastern Caribbean: Does the education system adequately prepare youth for the global economy?. World Bank Country Study, Washington, DC: World Bank.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/6375> License: CC BY 3.0

IGO.”

- Bracken, B. A. (2002). Bracken school readiness assessment. Pearson, San Antonio, TX, www.pearsonassessments.com
- Briceno, A. L., DeFeyter, J. J., & Winster, A. (2013). The school readiness of children born to low-income, adolescent Latinas in Miami. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83(2-3), 430-442. doi:10.1111a/jop.12021
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological systems theory. Greenwich, Conn: JAI Press
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). The bioecological theory of human development. Making human beings human. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Brown, A. H., & Benson, B. (2005). Making sense of the capstone process: Reflections from the front line. *Education*, 125(4), 674-692.
- <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-133837607/making-sense-of-the-capstone-process-reflections>
- Burlew, A. K., Montgomery, L., Kosinski, A. S., & Forcehimes, A. A. (2013). Does treatment readiness enhance the response of African American substance users to motivational enhancement therapy? *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 27(3), 744-753. doi:10.1037/a0031274

- Caribbean Community Secretariat. (2011). The Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). Retrieved from <http://www.caricom.org/jsp/community/cxc.jsp?menu=community>
- Caribbean Examination Council. (2015). Caribbean Examination Council: The official website. <https://www.cxc.org/>
- Carroll, A., Ashman, A., Bower, J., & Hemingway, F. (2013). Readiness for change: Case studies of young people with challenging and risky behaviours. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 23(1), 49-71. doi:10.1017/jgc.2012.17
- Chen, H., Lee, A Y., Parboteeah, K. P., Lai, C. & Chung, A. (2014). The effects of physicians' personal characteristics on innovation readiness in Taiwan's hospitals. *Innovation: Management, Policy & Practice*, 16(1), 158–169.
- Cigdem, H., & Yildirim, O. G. (2014). Effects of students' characteristics on online learning readiness: A vocational college example. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education (TOJDE)*, 15(3), 80-93. doi:10.17718/tojde.69439
- Conley, D. T. (2007). Toward a comprehensive conception of college readiness. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center
- Conley, D. T., & French, E. M. (2014). Student ownership of learning as a key component of college readiness. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(8) 1018–1034. doi: 10.1177/0002764213515232
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

- Chilenski, S. M., Greenberg, M. T., & Feinberg, M. E. (2007). Community readiness as a multidimensional construct. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(3), 347-365. doi:10.1002/jcop.20152
- Dahlberg, K. (2006). The essence of essences - the search for meaning structures in phenomenological analysis of lifeworld phenomena. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 1*: 11-19. doi: 10.1080/17482620500478405
- Dalton, C., & Gottlieb, L. (2003). The concept of readiness to change. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 42*(2), 108-117. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.2003.02593x
- Demir, K. Z., & Horzum, M. B. (2013). The relationship between online learning readiness and structure and interaction of online learning students. *Educational Services: Theory, and Practice, 13*(3), 1792-1797. doi:10.12738/estp.2013.3.1580. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1017736.pdf>
- Di Gropello, E. (2003). Monitoring educational performance in the Caribbean. World Bank Working Papers No.6. Washington DC. World Bank
- Dumas, T. M., Ellis, W. E., & Wolfe, D. A. (2012). Identity development as a buffer of adolescent risk behaviors in the context of peer group pressure and control. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*(4), 917-927. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.12.012
- Duncan, G. J., Dowsett, C. J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston A. C., Klebanov, P, Pagani, L. S... Japel C. (2007). School readiness and later achievement.

Developmental Psychology, 43(6), 1428-46. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.43.6.1428

Farran, D. C. (2011). Rethinking school readiness. *Exceptionality Education*

International, 21 (2), 5–1. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ949529>

Francis, B. (2006). You can never get too much education: The discourses used by secondary school students in their discussion of post-compulsory education.

Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 4(3), 305-319.

doi:10.1080/13596749900200061

Gesell Institute of Child, D. (2012). Gesell Development Observation-Revised. New Haven, CT: Author.

Gomez-Arizaga, M. P., & Conejeros-Solar, L. (2014). Gifted students' readiness for college: Factors that influence students' performance on a college entrance test.

Gifted Education International, 30(3), 212–227. doi:10.1177/0261429413486573

Gondo, M., Patterson, K. W., & Palacios, S.T. (2013). Mindfulness and the development of a readiness for change. *Journal of Change Management*, 13(1), 336-51.

doi:10.1080/14697017.2013.768431

Graue, E. (2006). The answer is readiness. Now what is the question? *Early Education*

and Development, 17(1), 43-56. doi:10.1207/s15566935eed1701_3

Griffith, S. (2009). The Caribbean Examinations Council: Leading and facilitating transformation in secondary education. *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*,

34(2), 40-55. Retrieved from

<http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/salises/publications/jecs/jecs-index.aspx>

- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 3 (1). Article 4. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf
- Halle, T.G, Hair, E. C., Wandner, L. D. & Chien, N. C. (2012). Profiles of school readiness among four-year-old Head Start children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 27, 613– <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2012.04.001>
- Hickling □ Hudson. A. (2004). Towards Caribbean ‘knowledge societies’: Dismantling neo □ colonial barriers in the age of globalization. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 34(3), 293-300. doi: 10.1080/0305792042000257130
- Holland, N. E. (2011). The power of peers: Influences on postsecondary education planning and experiences of African American students. *Urban Education* 46(5) 1029–1055. doi: 10.1177/0042085911400339
- Holme, J. J., Richards, M. P., Jimerson, J. B. & Cohen, R.W. (2010). Assessing the effects of high school exit examinations. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(4), 476–526. doi: 10.3102/0034654310383147
- Holton III, E. F., Bates, R. A., & Ruona, W. E. (2000). Development of a generalized learning transfer system inventory. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 11, 333–360.
- House of Commons. (2012). Report of the standing committee on national defense: The state of readiness of the Canadian forces. House of Commons, Canada. Retrieved

from Quarter Plan for Quarter 5 of Dissertation submitted as per course requirement

doi:10.1002/1532-1096(200024)11:4<333::aid-hrdq2>3.0.co;2-p

Hungerford-Kresser, H., & Amaro-Jiménez, C. (2012). Urban-schooled Latina/o, academic literacies, and identities: (Re)conceptualizing college readiness. *Perspectives on Urban Education*, 9(2), n. p. Retrieved from www.urbanedjournal.org

Ionescu, T., & Benga, O. (2007). Reconceptualizing early education on scientific grounds: School readiness in focus, *Cognition, Brain, Behavior*, 11(1), 49-65. Retrieved from <http://www.cbbjournal.ro>

Iruka, I. U., LaForett, D. R., & Odom, E. C. (2012). Relationship to children's school readiness across five cultural groups. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), doi: 10.1037/a0028290

Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., & Hur, E. (2014). Family and neighborhood disadvantage, home environment and children's school readiness. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(5), 718 –727. doi:10.1037/fam0000022

Iruka, I. U., LaForett, D. R., & Odom, E. C. (2012). Examining the validity of the family investment and stress models and relationship to children's school readiness across five cultural groups. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), 359-370. doi:10.1037/a0028290

- Judson, E. (2007). Retaking a high stakes mathematics test: Examination of school interventions and environments. *American Secondary Education*, 36(1), 15-30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41406095>
- Kırmızı, A. Ö. (2015). The influence of learner readiness on student satisfaction and academic achievement in an online program at higher education. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 14(1), 133-142. Retrieved from www.tojet.net
- Kramer, K. Z. (2012). Parental behavioural control and academic achievement: Striking the balance between control and involvement. *Research in Education*, 88, 85-98. doi:10.7227.RIE.88.1.8
- Kungu, K., Machtmeper, K., Prieto, L., & Jabor, K. (2012). Assessing readiness for lifelong learning: Volunteers to a 4-H youth development program. *International Journal of Learning*, 18(3), 23-43. Retrieved from <http://ijl.cgpublisher.com>
- Larson, S. L., & Vitali, G. J. (1988). Kindergarten readiness test. *Slosson Educational Publications Inc.* <http://www.slosson.com> .
- Lau, C. Y., & Shaikh, J. M. (2012). The impacts of personal qualities on online learning readiness at Curtin Sarawak Malaysia (CSM). *Educational Research and Reviews*, 7(20), 430-444. doi: 10.5897/ERR09.229
- Lewis, C. C., Simons, A. D., Silva, S. G., Rhode, P., Small, D. M., Murakami, J. L., &...March, J. S. (2009). The role of readiness to change in response to treatment of adolescent depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(3), 422-428. doi:10.1037/a0014154

- Le, V., Kirby, S. N., Barney, H., Setodji, C. M., & Gershwin, D. (2006). School readiness, full-day kindergarten, and student achievement: An empirical investigation. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
<http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG558>.
- Leonard, J. (2013). Maximizing college readiness for all through parental support. *The School Community Journal*, 23(1), 183-202. Retrieved from
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1004338>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
- Linder, S. M., Ramey, M. D., & Zambak. S. (2013). Predictors of school readiness in literacy and mathematics: A selective review of the literature. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 15(1), n.p. Retrieved from
<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v15n1/linder.html>
- Martin, A., Ryan, R. M., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2010). When fathers' supportiveness matters most: Maternal and paternal parenting and children's school readiness. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(2), 145-155. doi:10.1037/a0018073
- McAllister, C. L., Wilson, P. C., Green, B. L., & Baldwin, J. L. (2005) Come and take a walk: Listening to early head start parents on school-readiness as a matter of child family, and community health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(4), 617-625. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2004.047704,041616.
- McDonald, B., & Boud, D. (2003). The Impact of self-assessment on achievement: The effects of self-assessment training on performance in external examinations.

Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 10(2), 209-220. doi:
10.1080/0969594032000121289

McDonald, D., & Farrell, T. (2012). Out of the mouths of babes: Early college high school students' transformational learning experiences. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 23(3). 217-248, doi: 10.1177/1932202X12451440.

McDonald, D., & Kahn, M. (2014). So, you think you can teach? Reflection processes that support pre-service teachers' readiness for field experiences. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 1-34. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol8/iss2/18>

McGettigan, I. L., & Gray, C. (2012). Perspectives on school readiness in rural Ireland: The experiences of parents and children. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(1), 15-29, doi: 10.1080/09669760.2012.66446

Meisels, J. (1998). Assessing readiness. CIERA Report #3-002. Center for the Improvement in Early Reading Achievement. Retrieved from www.ciera.org

Miller, A. L., Lumeng, C. N., Delproposto, J., Florek, B., Wendorf, K., & Lumeng, J. C. (2013). Obesity-related hormones in low-income preschool-age children: Implications for school Readiness. *Mind, Brain & Education*, 7(4), 246-255. doi:10.1111/mbe.12034

Mora, R. (2011). School is so boring": High-stakes testing and boredom at an urban middle school. *Urban Education*, 9(1) n. p. Retrieved from <http://www.urbanedjournal.org>

Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Oon Seng, T. (2004). Students' experiences in problem-based learning: Three blind mice episode or educational innovation? *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*, 41(20), 169-184. doi:10.1080/1470329042000208693
- Oyserman, D., & Destin, M. (2010). Identity-based motivation: Implications for intervention. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 38(7), 1001– 1043. doi: 10.1177/0011000010374775
- Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, S. L. (1991). Foundation for the future: OECS Education Reform Strategy. Author
- Paltzer, J., Black, P., & Moberg, D. P. (2013). Evaluating community readiness to implement environmental and policy-based alcohol abuse prevention strategies in Wisconsin. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 57(3), 7-50. Retrieved from http://www.jadejournal.com/journal_abstracts%201.htm
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation method* (3rd ed.). pp. 40–41, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc
- Perikkou, A., Kokkinou, E., Panagiotakos, D. B., & Yannakoulia, M. (2015). Teachers' readiness to implement nutrition education programs: Beliefs, attitudes, and barriers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 29(2), 202-211. doi:10.1080/02568543.2015.1009202
- Piert, J. H. (2007). Transition into adulthood: The experience of a rite-of-passage program at an African centered high school. *The Negro Educational Review*, 58(3-4), 169-186. Retrieved from <https://www.questia.com>

- Phelps, L. (2012). Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale (2012 Restandardization).
Mental Measurements Yearbook with Tests in Print
- Prochaska, J. O., & Velicer, W. F. (1997). The transtheoretical model of health behavior change. *American Journal of Health Promotion, 12*(1), 38-48. doi:10.4278/0890-1171-12.1.38
- Ramnarain, U., & Molefe, P. (2012). The readiness of high school students to pursue first year physics. *Africa Education Review, (1)*, 142-158. doi: 10.1080/18146627.2012.683608
- Rault, P. K., Vreugdenhil, H., Jeffrey, P., & Slinger, J. H. (2013). Readiness and willingness of the public to participate in integrated water management: some insights from the Levant. *Water Policy, 101-120*. doi:10.2166/wp.2013.015
- Robotham, D. (2008). Stress among higher education students: Towards a research agenda. *Higher Education, 56*. 735–746. doi 10.1007/s10734-008-9137-1
- Rosas, S. R., Behar, L. B., Hydaker, W. M. (2014). Community readiness within systems of care: The validity and reliability of the system of care readiness and implementation measurement scale (SOC-RIMS). *Journal of Behavioural Health Services and Research, 1-19*. doi: 10.1007/s11414-014-9401-3
- Schaefer, M. (2014). Facilitating college readiness through campus life experiences. *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education, 37* (7). Retrieved from <http://www.amle.org>

- Schaefer, M. B., & Rivera, L. M. (2012). College and career readiness in the middle grades. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 7(3), 51-66. Retrieved from <http://www.infoagepub.com/mgrj-issue.html?i=p54c3b90edcf17>
- Shahrazad, W. S. W., Lukman, Z. M., Murni, A. R. R., Zainah, A. Z., Fauziah, I., & Arifin, Z. (2012). Personality traits as predictors towards readiness to change among female drug addicts. *American Journal of Applied Sciences*, 8(2), 134-140. doi: 10.3844/ajassp.2011.134.140
- Stevens, G. W. (2013). Toward a process-based approach of conceptualizing change readiness. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 49(3), 333–360. doi: 10.1177/0021886313475479
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). Modeling the determinants of college readiness for historically underrepresented students at 4-year colleges and universities: A national investigation. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(8), 972– 993. doi:10.1177/0002764213515230
- Tan, O. S., (2004). Students' experiences in problem-based learning: Three blind mice episode or educational innovation? *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*, 41(2), 169-184. doi:10.1080/1470329042000208693
- Tavallaei, M., & Abu Talib, M. (2010). A general perspective on role of theory in qualitative research. *Journal of International Social Research*, 3(11). Retrieved from http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com/cilt3/sayi11pdf/tavallaei_abutalib.pdf
- The World Bank (2007). Skill challenges in The Caribbean: Phase I Report. SCHOOL AND WORK- Does the Eastern Caribbean Education System Adequately Prepare

Youth for the Global Economy. Report No.: 38555. Washington D.C. The World Bank

- Trahar, S. (2009). Beyond the story itself: Narrative inquiry and autoethnography in intercultural research in higher education. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1218/2653>
- Tufford, L. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1). 80-96. doi:10.1177/1473325010368316
- United National Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2012). School readiness: A conceptual framework. New York: UNICEF. Retrieved from [http://www.unicef.org/education/files/Chil2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/education/files/Chil2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL(1).pdf)
- van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. New York: State University of New York Press
- Waldman, J., Glover, N., & King, E. (1999). Readiness to learn: An experiential perspective. *Social Work Education*, 18(2), 219. doi:10.1080/02615479911220211
- Walsh, M. (2003). Teaching qualitative analysis using QSR NVivo. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(2), 251-256. Retrieved from www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-2/walsh.pdf
- Weigel, D. J., & Martin, S. S. (2006). Identifying key early literacy and school readiness issues: Exploring a strategy for assessing community needs. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 8(2). Retrieved from

<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v8n2/weigel.html>

Weiner, B. J. (2009). A theory of organizational readiness for change. *Implementation Science* 4(67), 67. doi:10.1186/1748-5908-4-67

Yamamura, E., Martinez, M., & Saenz, V. (2010). Moving beyond high school expectations: Examining stakeholders' responsibility for increasing Latina/o students' college readiness. *The High School Journal*, 93(3), 126-148. doi:10.1353/hsj.0.0045

Yıldırım, Ö. (2012). A study on a group of Indian English as a second language: Learners' perceptions of autonomous learning. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(2), 18-29. Retrieved from www.tojqi.net

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: Cleon Athill

Interviewee: _____

Research Questions

RQ. 1. What are Antiguan and Barbudan students' experiences of readiness as they prepare for the CSEC examination?

Sub-questions:

1. What does it mean to students to be ready for the CSEC exam?
2. What are some key readiness issues as students prepare for the CSEC exam?
3. What readiness activities do students participate in leading up to the CSEC exam?
4. What is the meaning of readiness for students as they reflect on their preparation for the CSEC?

RQ 2. How do students experience support as they prepare for the CSEC?

Sub-questions

5. What are the supports that contribute to the experience of readiness
6. What “supports” are experienced as counterproductive?

Introductory (5 minutes)

Good day. Thank you for consenting to participate in this interview. My name is Cleon Athill. This interview is part of a study to explore students' experiences readiness as they prepared for the CSEC Exams. The interview will take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop me at any time, and you can also withdraw at any time. The interview will be recorded, and notes will be taken to ensure that I accurately capture what you are sharing. The interview is comprised of a set of nine questions. Is this clear? Shall we begin?

Questions (45 minutes)

Q1. Would you consider the sitting of the CSEC Exams an important undertaking?

Could you please share why you said that?

Do you think it's important for one to be ready to sit the Exam?

Q2. How ready do you think you were for the exam? Why do you say that?

Q3. Tell me about your experience preparing for the CSEC?

Remember that experience. What was that experience like for you?

Can you describe it? How did it feel? What were some thoughts you had about you being ready? What were some feelings you had? (feelings of being cared for, being respected, being safe and resourceful?).

Can you capture the difference between ready and not ready? What were some things that indicated to you that you were ready? What were some things that indicated to you that you were not ready? So, then what do you see as the critical difference between "being ready" and "being not ready"?

Q4. What were some things you did in order to be ready?

What was the most significant thing? The least significant thing?

Q5. As you think about this experience, what were some factors that supported, or determined, or helped your readiness?

Q6. What was the most significant factor in helping you to reach this state of readiness?

Could you please explain why you consider this to be the most significant?

Q7. What might you consider to be some readiness challenges or concerns you had as you prepared for the CSEC?

Q8 Do you think that your readiness is important for how well you did or did not do on the CSEC?

Q9 What suggestions do you have for increasing readiness experiences for others contemplating the same undertaking?

What specific advice would you give to students preparing for the CSEC Exam?

Wrap-Up (5 Minutes)

- What is the most important thing you want us to take away from this interview?
- Remember that the thoughts you shared today will be used to help us understand a very important issue-
- Remember that your identity will remain private, and what you have shared will be treated with the strictest of confidence.
- Also remember that the tape and notes are accessible to you. You will be invited to review these to ensure that I have captured all your thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- Finally, please note that you will be notified when the study is completed, and the findings will be shared with you within a month.
- Thank you for coming today and sharing.

Appendix B: Letter for Participation by Community Partner



Government of
Antigua & Barbuda
Ministry of Education, Science & Technology
Government Complex, Queen Elizabeth Highway . St. John's,
Antigua
Tel: 462-0192/462-0193/462-0198/462-0199
Overseas: 268-462-4959/1051

April 20, 2016

Dear Cleon Athill,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Antiguan and Barbudan Students of Readiness for the CSEC Exam Examination. As part of this study, I authorize you to contact schools to obtain student contact detail, to obtain and use the national data set of the most appropriate CSEC results, and to use of the school facility for the conduct of the interviews if necessary. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: access to the dataset CSEC results, endorsement and support for the study, and access to the counselling services should the need arise. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

.....
Clare Browne, Esq. GCM
Director of Education (Ag.)