

**An investigation into the progression of Saint Lucian male students through higher education**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctorate of Education

By Fiona Mayer

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## **Abstract**

In Saint Lucia, the number of young men pursuing higher education tends to be significantly lower than that of young women. However, there is limited scientific research into the topic of young males' participation and under-representation in higher education within the Saint Lucian environment. This qualitative research examined the main factors that affect young males in Saint Lucia as they journey through higher education.

The thesis examined the lived experiences that these young men encountered during the pursuit of higher education. As the lived experiences were shared, the authentic experiences of the young Saint Lucian males as it relates to higher education and the factors that influenced those aspirations were expressed.

This research is informed by Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology, which focuses on the importance of the participants' experiences. The work of Bourdieu is used to underpin the research. The research methodology used in this study ensured that the perspectives shared were based on the subjective experiences of the participants. With the use of purposive sampling, fifteen young males were selected as participants for this study. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with the fifteen participants of the Piton Institute of Higher Learning, which is located in Saint Lucia. The data analysis identified units of meaning and emergent themes.

The findings suggested that there was keenness towards, and aspirations of higher education after secondary school, in the minds of the participants in the study. According to their shared experiences, the path to higher education was influenced by social, economic and cultural capital.

The study brings new knowledge and perspectives to an area, which has been under researched in Saint Lucia, by focusing on the voices of the research participants. The impact of social, academic and cultural capital was explored in relation to the higher education aspirations and its part in the widening participation debate. This study being qualitative in nature, the findings are not generalizable to all Saint Lucia males. Nonetheless, the conclusions and recommendations provided a useful insight into how higher education can be made more accessible to young males in Saint Lucia and increase their success at completion of their studies. Further research can explore the perception of males in secondary schools about higher education. Based on the findings, it is recommended that necessary policy frameworks, financial and educational support systems be instituted to facilitate increased levels of male progression and success in higher education.

### **Keywords**

Phenomenology, widening participation, higher education, aspirations, mentorship, academic capital, cultural capital, social capital, Saint Lucian male students.

### **Statement of original authorship**

I, Fiona Mayer, confirm that this thesis has been written by me and contains my work. This work has not been submitted elsewhere for the fulfilment of any other qualification.



## **1 Chapter One - Introduction**

Historically, males from the Caribbean region have tended to be more privileged than females (Stockfelt, 2013), as it relates to pursuit of higher education and academic achievement therein. However, there seems to be a shift in this present era. Increasingly, there is concern about male underrepresentation in higher education within the region (Jackman & Morrain-Webb, 2019; Majzub & Rais, 2010). Hillman and Robinson (2016) report that while the educational expectancy for females has improved, it has declined for males. They found that in 2002 and 2012, the effective transition rate to secondary school was lower among males in several territories in the Caribbean including Saint Lucia.

This research seeks to add some insight into the present experiences of Caribbean males within the realms of education through a focus on the island of Saint Lucia and higher education. The research explores the factors, which facilitate or hinder young Saint Lucian males as they progress through higher education. This research focuses on the experiences of young Saint Lucian male students in higher education within the Saint Lucian educational environment, noting that these experiences can influence policy and practice. For the purpose of the study, progression refers to the satisfactory achievement through the courses of study at a higher education institution. The use of the term higher education is defined as education at a college or university where subjects are studied at an advanced level (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.) usually leading to an academic certification and qualification.

### **1.1 Current Situation of Higher Education in Saint Lucia and the participation of males**

Saint Lucia is a small island developing state located in the Eastern Caribbean. This former British colony received independence in

1979. The nation's education system is based on the British school system, from its pre-school education up to the higher education level. After its independence from Britain, the island took over management of all of its affairs including its educational management at all levels.

As articulated in the country's Education Act of 1999, education is perceived as a human right, which the government subject to the availability of resources is committed to affording all citizens. Saint Lucia has made strides in the provision of educational opportunities, for instance, the island has achieved universal primary and secondary education. In 1985, the country's main institution of higher education was established by an act of parliament.

The Piton Institute of Higher Learning (PIHL) receives one hundred per cent of its student body from the twenty-three Secondary Schools on the island. The cohort that qualifies for entry is directly influenced by the Secondary Schools that the students would have attended. Schools are ranked based on their performance at the Caribbean Examination Council assessment. The seven higher ranked schools account for eighty per cent of the school population, (Department of Education Statistical Digest, 2018).

The participants in this study came from a range of secondary schools located throughout the island. The rank of their secondary school was not a factor in this investigation as the focus was on male students who had accessed higher education in Saint Lucia. However, their completion of secondary school education was the determining factor that facilitated access to and progression through the Piton Institute of Higher Learning (PIHL).

This institution comprises various departments: the Division of Arts, Science and General Studies (DASGS); the Division of Technical Education and Management Studies (DTEMS); the Division of Teacher

Education and Educational Administration (DTEEA); the Division of Agriculture (DAgri); the Division of Health Sciences (DHS); and the Department of Continuing Education (DOCE). The approximate annual enrolment of PIHL is two thousand students, including both full- and part-time students. The College offers a range of courses that lead to associate degrees, diplomas and certificate qualifications. Various degree programmes, such as the Bachelor of Education, are offered in collaboration with sister organisation, the University of the West Indies.

Whereas PIHL has expanded its course offerings and capacity since its inception, opportunities to pursue higher education are still somewhat limited in Saint Lucia. According to the Education Sector Strategy of Organisation of Eastern Caribbean states (OECS) of which Saint Lucia is a member state, “fewer than 15 per cent of graduates from the secondary schools are able to access higher education while fewer than 10 per cent of adults in the OECS have completed tertiary level education” (OECS 2016).

For many young people, pursuing higher education is limited in Saint Lucia (Chitolie-Joseph, 2014). In terms of who is able to avail themselves to the existing opportunities, some inequalities exist. The enrolment data for the PIHL reveal significant gender imbalance with male enrolment at slightly less than 40% of the total enrolment (Government of Saint Lucia, 2018). The 2018 Department of Education Statistical Digest also reports that female students outnumbered their male counterparts at every one of the College’s eight divisions, including those that were traditionally subscribed to by more males.

Year	Female	Percentage Share	Male	Percentage Share
2015 –	1671	62.2	1015	37.8

2016				
2016 – 2017	1417	61.7	880	38.3
2017 – 2018	1315	60.7	853	39.3

Table 1: Overview of Student Population at The Piton Institute of Higher Learning

Despite the significant online higher educational options and more traditional educational opportunities for young men to access higher education, there remain several constraints (Watts & Bridges, 2006; Reay, 2012) for inclusion of particular groups of students. For young men who do gain access to higher education, several issues surface at the entry level and during the course of their studies. These include sporadic attendance at classes, lower academic attainment than their female classmates, involvement in social problems such as crime and limited application to their studies (Figueroa, 1996). These issues are of local and regional significance (Figueroa, 2009) to the extent that funding has been offered by the Caribbean Development Bank to the University of the West Indies to support male participation in higher education. He further states that “women now constitute over 70 per cent of the graduating class at the Mona (Jamaica) campus” (Figueroa, 2009) of the University of the West Indies.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The disparity at various levels of the education system in Saint Lucia, has contributed to a decline of successful male participation in educations (OECS, 2016). This situation at higher education levels remains of concern to education officials and the general populace. Former Minister of Education, Dr. Robert Lewis highlighted the reality of male underrepresentation. He noted, “there appears to be gen-

der disparity at the secondary and tertiary levels as females continue to dominate in terms of performance and enrolment figures at post-secondary and tertiary levels” (Lewis, 2013). There is limited documentation of the experiences of Saint Lucian males in higher education and so the reasons for the decrease in applications and recruitment are not clearly identifiable. During the interviews, I asked participants about their experiences of the recruitment to the course that were applying to. This study aims to address this deficiency in information by investigating the experiences of male students who are progressing through higher education. A strategic effort to collect data on male recruitment and applications to various courses of study will help inform higher education strategies. As a small nation, Saint Lucia should respond to the issues surrounding male underrepresentation and progress through higher education. He recognised this issue as a national priority (Lewis, 2013).

Intervention strategies such as after-school activities and male mentorship programmes have been initiated. These are part of a plan of action that can improve male participation in higher education within the Saint Lucian setting (OECS, 2016). Nonetheless, data to substantiate the effectiveness of those initiatives is limited and as such, the evaluation of the success or failure of such initiatives appears to be undocumented. Although quite visible in the news stories, there has been minimal formal educational research into the factors that affect representation of males in Saint Lucia in higher education.

### **1.3 Aim of the Research**

This research aims to explore and describe the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males as it relates to their progression to and through higher learning. It seeks to identify factors that may facilitate or impede their progression through higher education and the ways that the young males in Saint Lucia could experience and

manage those factors. By engaging young Saint Lucian males already in HE, the study aims to capture an authentic articulation of the voice of male students.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This research will consider the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males who pursued higher education as it addresses the questions:

1. What factors may facilitate or hinder young Saint Lucian males as they progress through higher education?
2. How do participants perceive and describe their experience of higher education in Saint Lucia?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

Addressing these questions will enable the research to meet the following objectives:

- To investigate the aspirations of young St. Lucian males who have enrolled in higher education
- To examine and describe the experiences of young males in higher education in Saint Lucia
- To evaluate issues that negatively or positively impact of young males in higher education in Saint Lucia as they seek to complete courses of study in higher education
- To highlight support strategies that can encourage and enable young Saint Lucian males to stay in higher education

#### **1.6 Relevance of the Investigation**

This research explores the experiences of young Saint Lucian males pursuing higher education, with the view of describing the impact of some of their experiences and how potential challenges might be addressed. These experiences included the discussion on completion of

secondary school about their next educational steps, and strategies that they have employed prior to applying to higher education. These are relevant as they identified the thoughts, and ideas associated with higher education by the young male students during secondary school. This research therefore seeks to fill the significant identified gap in terms of data on the underrepresentation of young males in higher education and contribute to the literature available on the topic specific to Saint Lucia.

Core to this research, is the importance to solicit and understand the perspectives and experiences of the participants. This is significant to the understanding of the issues that young males face while trying to complete their higher educational studies in Saint Lucia. The various factors that impacted their motivation as they engaged with higher education as a personal reward or their quest for a tangible reward were explored. These practical elements contributed to the further discussion and solutions to the issues. This research was significant as it allowed for the various pathways that young Saint Lucian male students use to access higher education to be identified and described. Additionally, it helped develop a better understanding of what motivates young males in Saint Lucia to engage with higher education, what barriers they faced and how they negotiated those barriers. The research has the potential to inform the higher education policies and practices of Saint Lucia and, by extension, the wider Caribbean region. It will contribute to the on-going discussions about male progression to and through higher education in Saint Lucia.

The use of the research site and the participants, who attend to their studies there, provides this authentic research setting. Silverman (2011) advises that researchers should adapt the investigation, in line with the philosophy of the flexibility in qualitative research methodologies. Based on this, I intended to use

an inductive approach after the data collection and categorise the data according to the patterns expressed by the data generated from the narratives of the participants. This approach was chosen as it allowed for the narratives of the participants based on their lived experiences which included their respective observations, the patterns derived from those experiences, and general findings.

### **1.7 Research Method**

Qualitative methods were used to conduct the study. It was used to gain a deep understanding of lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males. Silverman (2011) notes that qualitative research is locally situated in authentic settings instead of laboratory settings. Addressing the research questions required a deep understanding of the lives of the students and the social forces shaping how they viewed their own experiences in relation to progression through higher education. Those educational choices, or lack of them, are based on accumulated experiences.

Human beings have and develop views about the moments in their lives based on their experiences. Every individual has quite unique experiences, even when those experiences are quite similar. Those different perspectives lead to varied conclusions about a similar phenomenon or event and an individual sense of reality (Smith, 2010).

The research method of phenomenology was used to examine the young males' progression through higher education as the most suitable for the investigation. According to Giorgi (2012), "phenomenology wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task" (p. 6). The typical features of phenomenological analysis involve a researcher adopting a phenomenological attitude, which concentrates on the study of consciousness and direct experiences



(O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). It includes reading the ‘whole’ data for meaning and working closely with the detail, in order to transform the language expressed and seek the essential structure of an experience (Giorgi, 2010). This approach is best suited to this study as it examines the lived experiences of young males. In phenomenology, a common method of data collection is interviews. Interviews are appropriate as the tool to obtain the ideas and find out the lived experiences of males within the national Saint Lucian environment. Collating the views and values that individual students articulate through these expressions will enable further understanding. This serves to ensure that every student and participant has a voice and that his ideas are noted as specific to him and within the higher education context of Saint Lucia. Additionally, it is important to note that the students will use their voice in the wider social structures framing their individual accounts.

Giorgi (2010) used Descriptive phenomenological analysis (DPA) to facilitate data analysis. DPA is an analytical method for linguistic descriptive data, in the form of written or interview accounts, and Giorgi's (2010) methods are a popular form of such analysis. As the research involved interview accounts, I focus here on analysis. In order to minimize my influence on the data collection, this can be done by setting aside his or her preconceptions and assumptions about the topic and the participants, by using a process known as the phenomenological reduction, or bracketing (Giorgi, 2017). In the literature, there has been some debate concerning the relative merits and correct conduct of descriptive phenomenology (DP) versus interpretive phenomenology (IP) approaches to phenomenological analysis: for example, between Giorgi (2010), who favours descriptive methods, and Smith (2010), who supports interpretive approaches. For the purpose of this study, descriptive phenomenology was noted as more appropriate based on the research objectives. Further detail

of the methodological choices and approach adopted is provided in Chapter Three.

## **1.8 Research Rationale**

The initial thoughts and conceptualisation of this research came out of my experiences as an educator, and more so administrator, in Saint Lucia over the course of several years at different time periods. In addition, based on my work within the international school communities in Austria, India and Kenya, I was able to interact with students and educators from a range of educational institutions and systems. These experiences broadened my thinking about the education systems and their roles in supporting young males with whom I worked with, during their educational journeys and the influence on their higher education pathways and choices. In all of the countries that I worked; I was able to identify the differences in the education systems at various levels using anecdotal diary entries. These entries highlighted the way in which young males in Saint Lucia viewed the progression to higher education after secondary school life, as well as the various pathways and opportunities that they had available to them within their own countries and systems. Within the Saint Lucian educational setting, this overview led to my involvement in the launching of several support initiatives including the male mentorship programme and the academic sponsorship of a male student, to render support in a variety of practical ways to young people. Additionally, I sought to highlight the importance of higher education as a means of social capital (Bourdieu, 1993) and personal growth and development.

Additionally, the myriad of academic as well as social issues that I encountered as an Education Officer and school administrator, quite frequently with young males, has increased my motivation to investigate those issues formally. A major contributing factor as identified

by the educators that I worked with, was the socialisation of males into this Caribbean male identity (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). This perceived masculine identity within Saint Lucia contributed to situations of conflict within the education system and among community members.

This situation was not just peculiar to Saint Lucia; it was noted as prevalent in almost all the English-speaking Caribbean nations (Hinds, 2007). In looking at this phenomenon within the higher educational environment, Blair (2013, p. 87) notes, “higher education practice should not be high-handedly enforced but should be contextualised through careful reflection on the specific needs” of a country and people. In reference to the Saint Lucian society, Lewis (2013) states that the wealth of a nation is based on its educational levels.

The family background of individual students can be a factor that sometimes creates educational and social issues within the society. Noting that academic concerns were more pronounced amongst working-class students, the realisation of the impact on school life became clearer in my practice and outlook (Kutnick *et al.*, 1997). In the effort to raise the academic aspirations of the young males and support them as they consider higher education goals, career mentorship as part of higher education options were initiated. Through those initiatives, young Saint Lucian males from lower socio-economic backgrounds were encouraged to build an expectation of greater economic gain as an outcome of the pursuit of higher education.

In support of this idea, it was noted that academic concerns were more prevalent for lower income applicants in the Caribbean (Figueroa, 1996). For the many students who were concerned that they would not have the entry requirements to pursue higher educa-

tion, their academic concerns were seen as one the greatest discouragements to thinking about higher education.

Based on these interactions I have noted the challenges and difficulties that young Saint Lucian males who have accessed higher education experience. Based on my interaction with the young males, I agreed with Parry's argument that young men who engage in inappropriate social behaviours as previously noted, were more likely to be drawn away from pursuing educational goals, as this was not their daily social reality (Parry, 1997; Parry, 2000).

I also noted that the advancement of young Saint Lucian males through the various stages of higher education may be significantly impacted by factors such as peer group pressure, their prior learning experiences and the instructional programmes on offer. Additionally, student support services and the lack of value placed on higher education by family or society (Blair, 2013; Stockfelt, 2013) were noted as influential factors. Kenyatta (2012) highlighted similar social and academic disparities limiting educational progress that I have discussed and experienced with various students.

This is one of the reasons why Ministry of Education officials and school administrators in the local educational system were in constant dialogue regarding male underrepresentation in higher education (OECS, 2016) and the major social issues that the students encounter during their education journeys. The teachers within that system tended to mirror the concerns of their students and the parents from disadvantaged areas. However, educators played a significant role in identifying potential applicants who may lack the skills and foresight to recognise the importance of higher education (Harper, 2012).

## **1.9 Overview of Study Methods**

This research focused on the Saint Lucian males who were studying

at an institution of higher learning. This group was chosen as they have accessed higher education in a publicly subsidised institution and were in the process of progressing through their courses of study. The experiences of these students were investigated to understand how they negotiated their higher education within that setting. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain greater knowledge of their lived experiences. An important part of the investigation was my responsibility to ensure that the participants felt comfortable speaking on the issues that may have been personal to them and answering the questions during the interview. Gaining the trust of the participants during interviews should begin from the first contact with the participants. This establishment of trust can be facilitated by a transparent approach to the research, sharing of information about the breadth of the research and the purpose of the study. Additionally, the methods that were used, storage and usage of the data after the research was completed would need to be explained to the participants. The issue of confidentiality, anonymity as appropriate and the ethical appreciation for the lived experiences was particularly important in the investigation.

The study of young males in higher education generally, has implications for all aspects of the society, including the social systems, concerns about crime, family systems and the economic sector. The investigation of underrepresented, and marginalised males was therefore a constant concern for educational institutions, governmental and Non-governmental Organisations in the Caribbean (Plummer, 2013) based on the impact on the society.

### **1.10 Overview of the Thesis**

In Chapter One, the relevance of the study, the research questions, objectives, rationale, study methodology, and an overview of the institution of higher education were presented.

Chapter two will focus on the literature review. This chapter will identify and critically assess other studies that are closely related to the issues being investigated, relating them to the larger and ongoing literature around male educational underachievement, and thus providing a framework through which to pursue the study in an academically coherent way. In the next chapter, literature based on the experiences of generally, in higher education will be explored. The focus will present information based on international and regional sources while identifying the relevance to the local Saint Lucian setting.

In Chapter Three the methodology chosen for the research will be expanded upon. In particular, the chapter will set out and justify the use of qualitative phenomenological research as a method to explore the experiences of young males as they embark upon various pathways to higher education.

Chapter four presents the data and will focus on sub themes and common themes that have emerged during the analytical phase.

In Chapter Five, the findings are discussed in relation to prior research and an interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation is supplied.

A summary of the information that was presented in this study is provided in Chapter Six in the conclusion. The educational implications that can be drawn from the investigation and its impact on policy are discussed. The limitations of the investigation and opportunities for further investigation are discussed.

## **2 Chapter Two - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of the literature available on higher education in Saint Lucia, and the OECS countries as well as the value ascribed to higher education by various stakeholders. However, there is limited literature available on this topic concerning the wider Caribbean and particularly about Saint Lucia. The issues surrounding the inconsistent transition and progression of young men to and through higher education have been significant throughout the Caribbean islands, including Saint Lucia. Therefore, some of the literature reviewed is not particularly recent but it still has relevance to this study: for example, Parry's (1997) "Schooling is fooling': Why do Jamaican boys underachieve in school?" and Figueroa's (1996) *Work on the plantation school and Lewis: "Contradictions, continuities and continued Caribbean relevance"* (Figueroa, 1996).

### **2.2 Higher Education in Saint Lucia**

Higher education in Saint Lucia forms part of the national educational landscape. As various social and educational issues are presented, several authors argue that young men have not adequately contributed to the social and economic development of the country; nor have they developed personally (Plummer, 2013; Lewis, 2013). The limited participation of Saint Lucian males in higher education, and indeed within the wider Caribbean region, has been particularly significant as there is a link between idle males and an increase in poverty and crime levels based on the views of (Lewis, 2013; Jha & Kelleher, 2006) as present in Saint Lucian society.

I am mindful that limited participation in higher education has a direct correlation with the research findings that identify higher educational attainment of girls in both primary and secondary school settings as compared to young males within the Caribbean (Jules,

2008). A strong argument is made that a significant contributing factor to school achievement is the influence of a figure within the household and the association with attainment in the education system (Bailey, 2004; Revell, 2015).). In Cobbett and Younger (2012) study, this was further explored in relation to social class and the prevalence of mother dominated households in the Caribbean, including Saint Lucia. Similarly, and noteworthy is that the presence of a parent and more specifically a father in the household was correlated with social class (Parry, 2000). This in turn impacted the pursuit of young males in the Caribbean, into higher education based on the values placed on higher education by the parents and heads of their households. To impact this issue, many nations, including Saint Lucia, aim to recruit and retain more males into higher education and widen the participation of students (Lewis, 2013).

The move to a mass higher education sector, and the barriers caused by academic competition, can impact the entry into higher education institutions. These universities encourage far greater access and easier application procedures, (Reay, 2012) as part of achieving their student enrolment goals. Within the Saint Lucian environment there is a steady move towards improved higher education enrolment. This is similar to the example of the United Kingdom with its government targets for 50% entry into higher education by 2010 (Watts, 2006).

### **2.2.1 Increasing OECS Provisions for Continuing Education**

Within the Caribbean, there is a drive towards more strengthening of the total numbers in higher education, and more specifically males, to include diverse groups (OECS, 2016).

The intended outcomes, by 2021, from initiatives to implement this imperative will be:

- Sustainable funding mechanisms for tertiary and continuing



education to meet the economic, social and labour market needs of the OECS and learners can access affordable tertiary education.

- A legal institutional framework that improves the status, sustainability and outcomes of tertiary and continuing education institutions across the OECS.
- Accredited tertiary and continuing education institutions in and outside the OECS produce high quality, relevant programmes and research results fostering creativity and innovations (OECS, 2016).

### **2.3 Success in the Achievement of these Outcomes will be Measured**

Despite these successes with the OECS in terms of educational access and attainment, key areas of concern remain as per the OECS document that clearly identifies the goals and educational vision of the OECS member states (OECS, 2016).

These concerns include the inadequacies in access at the pre-primary and higher education levels in the various OECS countries: the net enrolment of students at the pre-primary level for the region averages just over 66 per cent. Based on the data collected in the eleven OECS member states by the OECS Commission, fewer than 15 per cent of secondary school graduates go on to pursue post-secondary education in and out of the region. Many of the students do not possess the critical thinking skills required for today's labour market, and many have deficiencies for the projected higher levels of knowledge and skills for future economies. In the member states, inequality has become more obvious and, in some areas, the most disadvantaged economically and socially may not be enjoying the benefits of the education system (OECS, 2016).

The various issues surrounding gender disparities in performance

are evident at all levels of the school system and there is declining participation of males at the upper secondary and tertiary levels. Many learners complete secondary schooling based on attendance; however, they have insufficient formal qualifications to proceed to the next level of education (OECS, 2016).

Within the member states, attracting and retaining qualified teachers has been difficult in some member states, particularly in some critical subjects like Mathematics, Science, English and Information Computer Technology.

This overview of the areas of concern as identified by the OECS are important as they too, highlight the issues associated with incompleteness of higher education as a regional issue. Some academics argue that the purpose of higher education is not only about formal education and academic qualification but also about relevance to the unique societal circumstances (Blair, 2013). Although this argument has validity, Caribbean universities are operating within a global market and to agreed global academic standards. Without reaching those standards, the issued degrees would not be accepted as meeting benchmarks and having equivalence for the purposes of post-graduate study, research and employment. It can be argued that Caribbean higher education institutions are not well placed to initiate localised standards of academic teaching based on the influence of colonial education systems, although this may be beneficial (Blair, 2013).

#### **2.4 Values of Higher Education**

Bok (2010) argues convincingly that the value and importance that parents, society, educators and other major stakeholders place on the attainment of higher educational qualifications are significant in the decision making of young males. Low behavioural expectations that may encourage misbehaviour are closely linked to the tradition-

al masculine roles in Saint Lucia and other Caribbean nations (Plummer *et al.*, 2013).

Recognising and managing the personal and organisational values of higher education professionals is also important in reinforcing the different values associated with males and females in Saint Lucia. Educators can choose to accept or not accept societal values in terms of their treatment of males in higher education. Such value judgements are made on a daily basis when decisions are made, and actions are taken in the interaction with young males. As Zupan (2012) states, such value-based decisions by significant others can be important to the perceptions that young males generally, develop during their educational journeys. My professional experience leads her to concur with this judgement. The alignment of the individual educators' values and that of the organisation will contribute effectively to educational journeys.

Although the values expressed by society are important and do form part of higher education, the decision of the young males themselves in the Caribbean remain pivotal to accessing higher education. It may be that young men value alternatives to higher education. Pre-higher education school environments and the availability of appropriate information often shaped these values (Bok, 2010). Personal experience, from initiatives to encourage young men to access higher education, confirms Bok's (2010) view that individuals place value on higher education based on their own judgements. The significance of the secondary school environment, its culture, staff and the experiences that students have there, can therefore influence higher education aspirations. Student experiences and socialisation in secondary school can undoubtedly reinforce notions of masculinity that are opposed to higher education aspirations (Abbot & MacTaggart, 2010; Plummer *et al.*, 2013; Stockfelt, 2013).

Figueroa (1996) posits that due to socialisation processes, young men develop a disadvantageous mind-set that is antithetical to school. He argues that compared to young women, young men are allowed much freedom to choose what they wish to do and when and how, the total opposite of that which is expected in the classroom (Figueroa, 1996). Both arguments are supported by evidence from my interaction with young people within educational institutions.

## **2.5 Transition to higher education**

The transition of young males in Saint Lucia from secondary schools to higher education institutions has been found to be a critical period. Secondary school teachers have an important role in guiding and facilitating the higher education aspirations of all students by instilling in them the value of such an accomplishment. Gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Saint Lucian males, is therefore of significance to this investigation. Harper (2012) noted that young African American males interviewed in his investigation in the US identified high school teachers as being among those individuals who supported their desire to apply to higher education and encouraged their search for a college. On the other hand, it was also noted that a teacher's expectation and belief that the student would or would not gain entry to a college influenced the process as well (Plummer *et al.*, 2013; Wright *et al.*, 1998). In sum, secondary school experiences can act as a catalyst for progression to higher education and poor experiences (e.g. a lack of engagement from students or their teachers) can have negative effects. Additionally, research on student experiences can have influence on policy and practice that impact the transition to higher education. The inclusion and appreciation of the experiences of young males within the Saint Lucian educational environment can offer substantial information to overcome the perceived limited interest in higher education. The issues

associated with access, matriculation requirements; factors that influence access to higher education within Saint Lucian are part of the discussion surrounding policy and practice as per the views of the young Saint Lucian males.

Similar to other Caribbean nations, the emphasis of Saint Lucian higher education is on the structures and the need for functionality, “where the university trains students for future employment and replicates societal norms” (Blair, 2013, p. 86). Based on the investment in higher education on the island of Saint Lucia and the need to ensure that higher education is aligned to economic growth, one can argue that this statement has some merit. Jules (2008) also argues convincingly that in the Caribbean are faced with the challenges associated with overcoming educational deficits as part of their “post-colonial legacy” (p. 2). Jules (2008) states that higher education is charged with “changing the nations” within the Caribbean for better. Furthermore, additional investment of both physical and human resources in educational institutions would improve upon the quality of higher education for the students to contribute to societal development (Crossley, 2010).

## **2.6 The Influence of Peer Pressure and Family**

Peer pressure can further affect the situation, since the influence of peers has an impact on the decisions to even consider Higher Education. Young men may question the rationale for the long-term investment in terms of time, money, and effort in education, as compared to the perceived quicker financial gains that prominent individuals without higher education qualifications have been seen to enjoy. Furthermore, Louisy (2004) accurately states that young males in Saint Lucia face the unique pressure of being one of the main financial contributors and the protectors of their families and therefore are more motivated to seek employment as compared to

pursuing higher education. Schools also determine the set path that most students should take and many boys who are struggling academically prefer vocational subjects that are more hands-on and practical to those subjects with exclusively theoretical orientations. Therefore, in school systems that do not cater to these particular needs, students either disengage or drop out of school for work opportunities (Majzub & Rais, 2010).

Inevitably the nurturing role of the family and the values highlighted within its varied structures could affect the educational aspirations of young men. A direct link between the educational values that families have, secondary school experiences and the pursuit of higher education is therefore established. Parental expectations and the reaffirming of the need for young men to attend higher education or engage in post-secondary studies is a strong motivator for young men to pursue higher education Harper (2012). This expectation of higher education aspirations as communicated throughout childhood serves as an encouragement for young men to engage effectively with higher education. This study has exposed a further gap in the literature surrounding how young Saint Lucian males have accessed higher education and the impact of parental expectations.

## **2.7 Gap in Literature**

In Saint Lucia, there has been limited formal investigation into, and documentation of, the transition to and access of young males to higher education. A comprehensive search for published studies of young Saint Lucian males in higher education found only limited literature. Specific studies in the region have focused on young males in Jamaica, and Trinidad. There have been relevant studies conducted on the topic in the United States and the wider Caribbean, for example Harper (2012), Plummer *et al.*, (2013) etc. This established gap in literature on such an important issue within higher

education in Saint Lucia emphasises the need for further studies on this relevant topic.

Therefore, this study on the experiences of young Saint Lucian males as they progressed through higher education is a new area of investigation. It is significant, as it is exploring new ground, as the Saint Lucian educational environment and this issue of male participation in higher education have not previously been explored in published literature. This investigation contributes to the literature locally, as well as internationally, and provides evidence of Saint Lucian young males and their experience as they transition from secondary to higher education. In this study, I propose to identify and discuss the Saint Lucian educational environment within which this issue occurs and to make the connections on a global scale.

Harper (2012) relates how efforts have focused on helping students' transition from secondary schools to colleges and universities, and on ensuring that they remain in these enrolled courses within the United States. This ultimately increases not only the number of graduates, but also those graduates' employability and subsequent potential positive contribution to society. In response within Saint Lucia, higher education institutions have developed policies and strategies to attract and retain students (Lewis, 2013). Some of these include a bursary programme, a book loan system that caters to the needs of needy youth as well as a transportation subsidy (Lewis, 2013).

There should be more research on Saint Lucian males, thus allowing their ideas to be considered in policies towards creating programmes that are relevant to their circumstance, support long term educational goals and provide for an enhancement of their social, cultural and academic capital. Input from students who are most impacted by higher education decisions must be investigated towards identify-

ing and reducing the barriers that young males face generally.

## **2.8 Cultural and Economic Context**

Traditionally, wealth and social standing have facilitated individuals', especially men's, access to higher education within the Saint Lucian context (Harmsen *et al.*, 2014). Historically, in the Caribbean, and specifically in Saint Lucia, the political economy has played a significant role in access to formal education. As access has evolved, the current situation is characterised by differences according to economic status and gender Jules (2008).

Bourdieu (1986, cited in Andersen & Hansen, 2011) makes the powerful case that the culture of the most dominant classes serves as legitimate culture, and young people who have been inculcated in these cultural forms from childhood will have the greatest probability of academic success along their educational journeys.

To further understand why there may be difficulties with the keenness with which young males in Saint Lucia wish to pursue, or not pursue, higher education, one should also note the economic background of Saint Lucia over the past two generations. Farming, and more specifically the banana export industry, was core to the development of the island. During that period, (1975 – 1990), the term 'green gold' was coined to refer to the banana industry, since farmers earned a considerable amount of money selling this product (Harmsen *et al.*, 2014). The pursuit and attainment of higher education qualifications was not a prerequisite to being successful in that industry since many uneducated farmers acquired wealth (Harmsen *et al.*, 2014), and this reinforced a perception that education was not important to becoming successful (Reay, 2011). Although this notion may arguably be changing, many young men are still confronted with the dilemma associated with the benefits of higher education vis-à-vis the amount of financial and personal commitment it re-



quires (Gunetilleke *et al.*, 2011).

In this regard, a particular socioeconomic issue facing parents and students is deciding between the fulfilment of their immediate needs and the possible long-term benefits of education. The initial costs of getting into higher education, which may be funded in its entirety by parents, and the probable lack of or reduction of income as a result of study commitments, contributes to the discussion about the benefits of higher education. For many parents it is difficult to support their family while paying tuition fees for their child/children in universities (Browne & Shen, 2017).

Although the possibility to remove oneself from poverty may be a reality to outsiders looking in, for many young males generally, this can be a major challenge, as noted about African American young males (Harper, 2012). Additionally, the issue of social debt incurred by students who have been supported by their parents highlights the expected commitment of students to their parents. Parental contributions to higher education may be seen as a major means of financial support and obligations for individuals to the parents. The students may feel that they should pay back in a tangible way by supporting their parents, after the completion of their studies, or offer support to other family members while living up to their family's expectations.

Some young males in the Caribbean have not seen the need to go through the rigours of higher education in order to achieve a professional career (Plummer *et al.*, 2013; Stockfelt, 2013), although an education is generally associated with a way out of poverty. Two other avenues out of poverty are social networking as well as the social capital development that accessing higher education could foster. Improvements in the lives of people are enhanced through education, employment and intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and

social bridging capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Additionally, informal training can promote social capital through education (Rojas, 2005). The social capital available to the potential student prior to beginning higher education sometimes directly reflects the parents' social class and educational achievements. It can therefore be argued though individuals may be able to pursue higher education irrespective of their social background, social capital may impact that pursuit (Lewis, 2013). Based on that assertion, it can be concluded that the very tool that can support human development in terms of higher education is further compromised by limited access to relationships and heightened networking (Browne & Shen, 2017).

Young men in the Caribbean, including Saint Lucia, are typically expected to support their families (Stockfelt, 2013). These sometimes, severe realities or necessities have shaped the educational aspirations of young men as they seek to manage those implicit or subtle responsibilities.

Opportunities for these young men to access higher education tend to be enhanced, if they are given access routes through political and financial means. Also, the role and influence of parents is significant in that process. It can therefore be concluded that, although finance plays an important role in the pursuit and completion of higher education, the family values also play a part.

In addition to parental expectations, several factors, such as economic, cultural, and social factors affect males' access to higher education (Figueroa, 2009). During interviews with various African American young males in higher education, Harper (2012, p. 9) stated that, "parents who consistently conveyed what the participants characterized as non-negotiable expectations to pursue post-secondary education" were more likely to ensure that they prepared for such. It is important to note that the cultural experiences and

environments also contribute to self-determination. That is, certain experiences can support or deter males' motivation to attain higher education (Maharaj *et al.*, 2016). Within the Saint Lucian social environment, there is the reality that young males are at greater risk as compared to young females, and that having behavioural issues prevents their educational advancement.

Jackman and Murrain-Webb (2019, p. 1) assert, "The superior performance of females over males at high school and other levels appears to be a growing international phenomenon." The 2018 Statistical Digest in Saint Lucia indicated that there were more Saint Lucian females enrolled in higher education. There were differences in the rates at which males and females completed or attained their college education. This impacted the employment and labour market structures (Conger & Long, 2010). Within the Saint Lucian market, many forms of employment that favour manual work, such as construction work, are noted as highly paid. This is in contrast to clerical work, which requires higher qualifications, that comes with a more consistent but lower pay. Under this system, Caribbean males sometimes found higher education unnecessary for guaranteeing access to paid work and continued economic dominance (Cobbett, 2013). Although higher education is tasked with attracting students and academic attainment, it is subject to these structural issues in the labour market that it cannot influence.

The psychological and financial demands on a student become more pronounced as the student goes through the educational journey. Within the higher education system, financial aid to students is made available. Saint Lucian females have consistently outnumbered males in the application for such financial aid (The Piton Institute of Higher Learning statistics, 2010 - 2016). Students who were not able to benefit from the financial aid may have missed out on the opportunity to enhance their education with the benefits that such

aid would have provided.

Plummer *et al.*, (2013) credibly argued that Caribbean males have been found to act 'macho' in their quest to align themselves to public affirmations of masculinity or even accept gestures of support, as may be the case of financial support from institutions of higher education. It can be argued that young men should be motivated enough to find opportunities to develop themselves. One could also argue that young men need direction, support and cannot be left entirely on their own to manoeuvre all educational experiences successfully (Reay, 2012). Mentorship is an important factor that helps males chart a course for academic success.

In the Caribbean, and especially Saint Lucia, the dominant position of males has been in waged work and income generation. Many economies, including that of the Caribbean, enable males to get jobs despite having lower qualifications than females (Plummer, 2013). In this case, Caribbean males will find higher education unnecessary as a means to improving their lives economically (Cobbett, 2013). In this instance, the rejection of, or limited use of, financial support, at the cost of not being able to attend higher education, seems to reinforce cultural norms of masculinity.

In the Caribbean, and more specifically Saint Lucia, consecutive Education Ministers have directed considerable attention over the last decade to solving the problem of boys' underachievement and trying to keep them out of trouble (Cobbett & Younger, 2012; Parry, 2000). Equitable access to higher education can enable many young people who are from the lower socio-economic bracket to take advantage of better employment opportunities, thus causing reductions in poverty (Harper, 2012).

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework: Pierre Bourdieu**

The sociological studies of Pierre Bourdieu are an integrated theoretical framework of relevance to education. His concerns include the understanding of practical interactions of everyday life including that of educational institutions. Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts include different forms of capital, such as social, cultural and academic. His work points to everyday life experiences as dynamic (Hayton & Bengry-Howell, 2016).

The field of education can be understood as a social setting where class dynamics take place (Reay, 2012). Pierre Bourdieu developed an integrated theoretical framework that is relevant to research that seeks to understand the experiences of everyday life (Power, 1999). As the work of Bourdieu is integral to this investigation, the importance of understanding power as it relates to various forms of capital, as theoretical concepts will be introduced (Dumais, 2015).

## **2.10 Social Capital**

Social capital identifies social participation and network connections that can be used to facilitate advantage and mobility (Bourdieu, 1986) in a variety of situations. The basic component of social capital is that it embodies networks of relationships that individuals have that are developed with a range of stakeholders. These relationships generate a variety of social processes, which can be valuable within a higher education environment. The personal qualities that include an individual's attitude, use of authority and ability to interact with others, add value to the environment contribute social capital. Social capital further contributes to an individual's social importance, including the aspirations and choices made in higher education. Social capital is significant in this study as young Saint Lucian males within the educational landscape see higher education

attainment as a way to enhance their lives including increasing their social capital.

Financial investment in all forms in higher education can impact social capital and help position individual students so as to better access and progress through higher education. Social class and the way in which it can be deployed to secure advantages in those social and educational settings points to the relevance of social capital.

### **2.11 Cultural Capital**

There is a significant body of work examining the complex relationships between social background and access to higher education in the United Kingdom (Reay, 2012) and what sociologists refer to as cultural capital can be found at the heart of many of these analyses. Cultural capital, considered one of the main elements in educational interactions, is more than the possession of obvious academic commodities such as formal educational qualifications. It includes the collective advantages of an individual's social background and focuses specifically on characteristics such as the type of school, college or university that someone attended. In addition to these elements, their manner of speaking, their ability to present themselves in a social context, knowledge of the arts and their ability to effectively articulate their knowledge on a variety of topics are considered part of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996).

Higher education institutions clearly have the capacity to create high levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Thus, many individuals desirous of accessing higher education have more reason to value the benefits of higher education attainment as a source of cultural capital. Many students would choose to attend higher education institutions that feel connected to their own cultural backgrounds, thus increasing their level of comfort. This includes being with other individuals that they believe are similar to them (Reay, 2012). This is

important as most young males should see others accessing higher education and taking advantage of the possible benefits.

Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996), the main element in educational interactions, is more than the possession of academic commodities such as formal qualifications. A major part includes the accumulated benefits of an individual's social background, such as the educational institutions that they attended, their level of confidence and the knowledge that they possess. All of these elements therefore influence an individual's perception of his or her identity and the perceived legitimate right to higher education within a particular environment. Participation in higher education for working class students is an opportunity to gain more advantages.

The concept of cultural capital offers an explanation of educational inequalities. It challenges presumptions attributing success or failure to innate advantages such as intelligence and it can account for inequalities. Specific examples include the progression rates to higher education, and the reserves of cultural capital individuals inherit from their family backgrounds and acquire from their education.

### **2.12 Academic Capital**

Academic capital is an institutionalised form of cultural capital, which incorporates prior educational achievements and specific capabilities and the willingness to access higher education (Bourdieu, 1993). It can also include the qualifications and scholastic dispositions that constitute academic capital. This acquisition by students presents opportunities for young Saint Lucian males to consider higher education. The choices and strategies that young males generally use in accessing higher education can help improve their positions academically in the communities that they are part of.

One can argue that the policies of government and leaders of higher education institutions have the responsibility to facilitate those ad-

vantages. Understanding the perspectives of students might bring those ideas closer to reality. This can be done by reflecting on government policies and their implementation of higher education programs that reflect the needs of students. Some researchers also recommend the need for a re-articulation of curricula to reflect male-friendly relevance and pedagogy or a recuperative masculinity agenda (Bailey, 2004). However, while devising programmes of instruction in which students' voices, both male and female, can be clearly heard is positive, the creation of single gender curricula is not in keeping with standards of gender equality, which educational institutions must uphold (Parry, 1996).

These changes, and feedback from students about government policies and institutional programmes, could help build academic capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Accountability as evidenced from student experiences and perspectives on policies is needed in light of policy-making and implementation that require consensus and capacity building and information sharing (Tsuruta, 2013). In support, Cobbett and Younger (2012) assert that students' views, voices and experiences will give both education institutions and researchers more insights into the educational direction needed.

In this research, academic capital and the academic characteristics it generates are explored to contribute to its relevance in the discussion on the progression of young Saint Lucian males to higher education. This enabled the identification of the opportunities these students had to attain the formal entry in a higher education institution and make use of academic capital in successfully progressing there. This will be discussed further in the data analysis and findings sections.

### **2.13 Widening Participation in Higher Education**

The increased participation of individuals can raise the possibilities



of higher education attainment by under-represented groups and individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds (Watts, 2006). Many countries have made widening participation a strategic priority and in the past twenty years the participation in higher education has expanded significantly globally (Chowdry *et al.*, 2013). An increase in participation in higher education is especially noteworthy since it can spur human development and hence become a critical part of a country's development (Louisy, 2004). That development can be manifested by an increase in people's ability to think critically. Based on the aims of higher education and an individual's ability to gain higher qualifications, to be rational and to apply creative and innovative solutions to societal issues. In spite of this advantage, and the possible development of skills, concerns about the inequality of access to universities based on the socio-economic status of students, many of whom were disadvantaged, remains a major policy issue for developed and developing countries (Chowdry *et al.*, 2013). It must be noted that the main goal of widening participation in higher education is to make higher academic skills more accessible to more than just a select few individuals (Altbach, 2010). It can then be argued that widening participation aims to address the discrepancies of access to higher educational opportunities from persons of varied social and economic groups.

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), of which Saint Lucia is a member, is mindful that widening participation supports equality. It has therefore embarked on a drive to increase the enrolment numbers of males in higher education as females outstrip males by a ratio of 2:1 in higher education across the region (OECS, 2016).

Similarly, Altbach (2010) argued that widening participation ensures that persons from a wide cross-section of society access higher education. Today, this includes the students who access higher educa-

tion virtually. This considerable growth in the number of students accessing higher education has caused a movement from an exclusive system to mass education in some developed countries (Altbach, 2010). The structures and offerings of higher education have been affected by this movement to include those previously considered to be non-traditional students.

According to Altbach (2010), the most dramatic result of greater access has been the “expansion of enrolment of women” (p. 50). Women now comprise the majority population figures in higher education in many developed as well as developing countries (Harper, 2012). In Saint Lucia, widening participation has enhanced the enrolment of women.

There are however, various groups of disadvantaged males for whom higher education remains a low probability and priority. It has been noted that Saint Lucian males do not participate as much as Saint Lucian females in higher education. This is a phenomenon that is similar to that of other Caribbean nations. For instance, according to Simon (2017), the number of females far outweighed male enrolment in the 2017 orientation activity for new students at the University of the West Indies Open Campus in Saint Lucia. The numbers of students accessing higher education in Saint Lucia has grown, in varied socio-economic sectors as increased opportunities, particularly online studies, have been made available. However, young males, particularly from the lower socio-economic groups in Saint Lucia, remain less able to access and complete higher education (Louisy, 2004).

With the 2006 introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in Saint Lucia, every child now had an opportunity to access secondary schooling (Education Statistical Digest, 2018). This becomes increasingly worthy of attention because USE has allowed for all

students to gain the prerequisites to access higher education. Despite USE, however, there is little data to show that its introduction has affected male attendance at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning positively. In fact, for the past five years, at the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies, located in Saint Lucia, male enrolment has steadily lowered.

Year	Male Enrolment in higher education courses
2015 – 2016	14%
2014 – 2015	14%
2013 – 2014	15%
2012 – 2013	17%
2011 – 2012	18%

Table 2: (University of the West Indies Student Statistical Digest 2011/2012 – 2015/2016, Open Campus)

In comparison, female enrolment has been maintained and, in some cases, increased. These figures are supported by the anecdotal reports of teachers of higher education at the community college, for whom this is a matter of concern.

This limited number of males accessing higher education is a cause for concern. Lewis (2013) noted that, island wide development would be severely inhibited and negatively impacted if capable young men are unemployable and remain on street corners or participate in criminal activity rather than be productive. Publicly, the government of Saint Lucia has expressed concerns about young men and their level of societal contribution. The statistics from the Saint Lucian Central Statistical Office (CSO) show that there was an increase in the rate of male youth unemployment in the first quarter, rising from 35.3% in 2016 to 41.6% in 2017 as compared to young women where it decreased for the same quarter from 39.2% to 35.6%.

Those concerns about the success of young men as they access

higher education further highlight the importance for them to voice strategies and policies that would impact the issues surrounding higher education. As expanded on in Chapter Three, the research method of phenomenology has been used in this study. This approach was appropriate as it allowed for varied student experiences to be elicited and described based on authentic interviews with young male participants. The investigation utilised this phenomenological methodology to identify the lived experiences of participants and understand how those experiences help us understand the progression of young Saint Lucian males through higher education.

### **Student Voice**

Studying the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males who have accessed higher education, can allow participants to have a voice in the ideas shared about higher education, thus enabling further success. Additional student input into the development of program offerings and thus the relevance to these students' educational needs may be enhanced. This is aligned with the philosophy of phenomenological research that is premised on naturalist paradigms that investigate changeable and subjective realities by using inductive and deductive qualitative research methods (Reiners, 2012).

Higher education is explicitly connected to economic activity and growth and is therefore politically important (Stockfelt, 2013). Policy aimed at forging a quick move to widespread availability of higher education has been noted as being effective and successful. The contrast between many developed countries and Saint Lucia is vast in terms of educational resources. The Saint Lucian government is aware that educational change cannot be pursued and implemented with limited public involvement and decision-making, and therefore is focusing on empowering the populace to see the importance of attaining higher education (Lewis, 2013). As governments and other

institutions highlight their political and economic goals for widening participation with a focus on empowering young males, these males must be consulted and involved in shaping their educational journeys.

Widening participation is a component and key mandate of the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) through its Department of Education. This regional organisation, which supports small island states like Saint Lucia, shares a prominent place in the debate on the accessibility for various groups to higher education. This access can signify both academic attainment and social development for many young Saint Lucian males who, by their limited access, would be a significant part of the higher education discussion. In this thesis the real opportunities for young Saint Lucian males to successfully apply to and complete higher education is explored.

As widening participation was explored, the conditions that promote access and the resources needed to contribute to increase access have been investigated. It is the work of Pierre Bourdieu that informs a lot of the information and literature on the sociology of education and widening participation. This work addresses the cultural mechanisms and factors that can influence the choice that individuals make: to either replicate the social inequalities education can produce or choose to act differently. Individuals are capable of accessing higher education, which would enable them to address, these concerns of social inequalities. Individuals have the ability to choose and lead lives they value. Through their choice of educational pursuits one can evaluate the significant value that young males generally, place on higher education.

Many young males in Saint Lucia may be presumed to lack what is needed to succeed in higher education and take on the challenging assessment practices of higher education. The emphasis on widen-

ing participation for young Saint Lucian males, if they are to benefit from their higher education, includes effective academic goals. Cobbett and Younger (2012) make the credible argument that, given the problems of male underachievement; there is a need, through active macro-accounts, to comprehend the psychological and social processes that young males may adopt in relation to their higher education goals (Clark *et al.*, 2008). The factors that prevent them from accessing educational opportunities need to be identified based on their own accounts.

### **2.14 Support Strategies**

The various factors, namely support strategies, values and motivation, that affect higher education enrolment of males in Saint Lucia as they seek to achieve higher education are discussed in the following section.

As a means of support, male role models and their contribution to successful engagement with education at all stages should not be disregarded. Noting that young males are statistically less inclined to access higher education in Saint Lucia, formal or informal mentorship programmes can aid their success in higher education. As relationships are developed and cultivated with professors and other educational stakeholders, Africa American students in the US noted that instructors played a pivotal part in their lives (Harper, 2012), thus developing and cultivating relationships with education stakeholders. This collaboration contributes to more engagement and more substantial educational exchanges. A further support mechanism employed by mentors to enhance higher education access and create the environment whereby the young men become better prepared for higher education is the deliberate sourcing of resources to enhance their education. The importance of students cultivating relationships with faculty, with administrators and building social

contacts is therefore vital (Harper, 2012).

As a means of structured support, schools would benefit from having organisations that would unite young male students (Harper, 2012). Harper's (2012) study of young African American males revealed that participants believed that having African-American teachers would benefit them and motivate them to excel academically. In contrast to this view, young male students in Saint Lucia have teachers of a similar racial and cultural background, yet they are not accessing opportunities to benefit from higher education. Based on my personal experience, accessing higher education is not a major topic of discussion among the students that I interacted with in the Secondary school setting.

Some authors highlight the significance of strong male role models (Lewis, 2013; Plummer *et al.*, 2013). When examining Scottish education, for example, Riddell and Tett (2010) observed that some educators are of the belief that the declining number of men in teaching positions correlates directly to the problem of boys' underachievement. On the other hand, it has also been argued that the gender of the teacher is insignificant or irrelevant to the achievement of males; what really matters is the way in which they engage students within the learning environment, which may reflect the Saint Lucian educational reality (Harper, 2012; Riddell & Tett, 2010). In examining the academic achievement of African-American high school males, Harper (2012) found that nurturing, intelligent teachers, strong administrative leadership, and strong bonds between parents, schools and the community offered the greatest impact on the academic attainment for African-American males. It would therefore seem that students more frequently remain in school when social relations with teachers and administrators are positive and strong (Bolden *et al.*, 2009).

Students may also benefit from mentorship initiatives, and so Harper's point of providing structures whereby young African American males, and likewise Saint Lucian young males, can find commonality with their peers is valid (Harper, 2012; Reay, 2012). Within the Saint Lucian context, organizations such as Rise Saint Lucia, which is a non-governmental organization (NGO) have proposed and implemented a mentorship programmes as part of the Caribbean Youth Empowerment programme. Through this, young Saint Lucian males are paired with mentors drawn from a range of backgrounds who can support their academic and social development. Some of the benefits of having these set structures include having males who have been academically successful and so are equipped to take on leadership roles. In addition, these men can help others facing similar issues to the ones they had faced and can so become role models themselves for others who may be struggling as they were. Having this structure in place in higher educational institutions not only allows for the young men to feel valued but can also be a catalyst that propels other male students to academic and social success. This Programme continues to support young males, however there is limited formal data to substantiate its effectiveness and impact.

### **2.15 Motivation**

Motivation is the concept of why people think and behave as they do: the confidence in an individuals' ability to know they have the resources and willingness to perform at high levels (Newman *et al*, 2014). It is an important element in educational progression. The social environment in which individuals find themselves impacts their motivational levels. The main premise of self-motivation is that people want to grow, develop and improve themselves (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015). In order to achieve that they will undertake new experiences so as to broaden their skill sets. This study



has implications for this current investigation since the choices that young men make to access, and complete, higher education is linked to the attainment of personal goals and needs.

A supportive higher educational and social environment helps create individuals with high levels of motivation who have a stronger belief in their ability and achieving their goals (Newman *et al.*, 2014; Thompson, Lemmon, & Walter, 2015). Young males, however, may not have the necessary motivation to make their own decisions and therefore regulate their own behaviour at the time of entry to higher education. Stahl and Dale (2013) emphasise, therefore, that the needs of young males, generally, in terms of achievement is significant to their engagement or disengagement; this then facilitates or shapes their behaviours in educational institutions.

Additionally, even after the male has accessed higher education, it is paramount that his interest in higher education be maintained so as to complete the course. With reference to male African American students, Kenyatta (2012) stated “the intersections of gender place them at odds with their environment, resulting in academic under-performance” (p. 1). The presence of male role models can provide further support in that regard.

Within the setting of higher educational institutions, the availability of financial support (Parry, 1997) to students who needed it was often one factor that helped them to negotiate possible barriers more effectively. Based on my discussion with the student advisor at the college, it was revealed that financial aid is offered based on student need at the institution of higher learning. This service is offered to those who apply, meet the criteria of requiring financial support, and those who get accepted into their programme of choice.

All of these factors, therefore, have a significant influence on the individual’s perception of his or her identity and the value that is

placed on improving one's own situation within a particular educational environment. This is significant in the discussion about the Saint Lucian school system and the value placed on the attendance at better-ranked secondary schools. As individual students consider applying to higher education, both social suitability and academic ability may be factors that will impact them. The academic concerns and expectations remain underwritten by socio-cultural issues, in particular how the student perceives himself as well as how society perceives him.

### **2.16 Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced the cultural environment within which this investigation took place. The various elements that impact the transition and progression of young males in Saint Lucia namely support strategies, values, and motivation was identified. The concept of widening participation, within the context of developed as well as developing countries were discussed in relation to the local higher education environment. The international widening participation debate indicates trends in higher education. In this study the experiences of the young males in Saint Lucia will be explored as they form part of the debate and are a real concern. That debate is located in wider social structures that note the importance of consultation with young males and ensuring that they have a voice in Saint Lucian higher education. The limited literature on the progression of young males in Saint Lucia needed to identify the barriers that they face to higher education.

This literature review has expounded upon the challenges that young Saint Lucian males encounter as they access and progress through higher education. The difficulties of young males in higher education are certainly not unique to Saint Lucia. Figueroa (2009, p. 1) states, "Males are now the underachievers on global indicators,

especially at the higher levels of the system”. However, many males are leaders in the educational sector and so significant to policy creation and implementation and the wider societal impact. These gaps informed the development of my research aim and questions which are presented in the next chapter.

In this investigation, I will address the gap in literature within the Saint Lucian higher education context and the progression of young males. As this concept of accessibility and widening participation is discussed, it is important to note the lived experiences of the young Saint Lucia males directly. This is an area in which limited research and investigation has been done. The impact of cultural, academic and social capital was explored in relation to its relevance to the access of students to higher education. The connection between those concepts, academic, cultural and social capital is presented as valuable components of this research.

Further exploration of the factors that motivate young males, and the role that their socio-economic status plays on this access of racially diverse individuals was noted as important. The critical part that financial resources have a means of making use of higher educational opportunities, the consequences of social networking and the power of higher education as a tool for alleviating poverty among socially deprived individuals were explained.

### **3 Chapter Three - Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Two, I reviewed literature based on the investigation into the transition from secondary schools, progression of young Saint Lucian males through higher education. This chapter outlines the qualitative research design that focuses on the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males aged eighteen to thirty in higher education at PIHL. This age range is reflective of the cohort and those who volunteered to be part of the study.

The chapter opens by discussing the selection of the research paradigm, by providing an overview of my epistemological and ontological stance. The purpose of the study and the key research questions are then presented. A definition of, and reasons for adopting, a Qualitative Methodology are then outlined; and two main methodologies are identified, namely Descriptive and Interpretative Phenomenology, which are then compared for relevance to this study. An overview of the Descriptive Phenomenology method is presented and its suitability to this study demonstrated. The general research strategy, involving the use of phenomenological interviews, is then summarised.

Sub-sections describing the Study Sample, the Recruitment Process, the Research Site, the Interview Content and Process and the Methodology. This is followed by the Data Analysis Methodology section which provides an overview of the data analysis process modelled on Giorgi's 5-step process, as used in this study. Within the Design Issues section, questions of Data Validity, Data Reliability, Reflexivity and Generalizability are then addressed, as they relate to this research. Finally, the key points from the chapter are summarised in the conclusion.

### **3.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the lived experiences of young male students at PIHL in Saint Lucia regarding their progression through higher education.

I chose the Piton Institute of Higher Learning, an institution of higher learning as the research site because it facilitates various pathways to further and higher education. In the approval letter dated December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 explicit permission was given to conduct research at the institution and the support of the administrative office offered. Additionally, a request was made to have a copy of the research handed over to the institution on its completion. It enrolls the largest number of students of any educational facility in Saint Lucia. Although additional efforts were made to also include the University of the West Indies Open Campus, which shares the physical site, ethical application protocols and limited time did not allow for this to happen.

Many researchers have studied young males in higher education generally, and asked the students personally about their experiences while accessing or being part of higher education, noted Harper (2012) who has studied African American males in higher education within the United States education system. Within the St Lucian higher education environment, indeed within the entire Caribbean region, few research studies have sought to engage young Caribbean males about their educational journeys (De Lisle, 2015). I have not found any previous studies relating specifically to young men progressing through higher education in St Lucia. This study is unique in that it gives young Saint Lucian males a first-hand opportunity to relate their experiences, describe their challenges and express their thoughts on the higher education environment.

### **3.3 Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is a basic set of beliefs or worldview that guides research action or an investigation. The study of human behaviour involves the selection and choice of a research paradigm with the objective of improving the credibility of the study (Kankam, 2019). The selection of a research paradigm would vary based on the investigator's choice as well as the issue under investigation. The application of the research paradigms should include philosophical assumptions but also focus on the practical consequences of the inquiry and the description of the findings (Hallebone & Priest, 2009). Four broadly applied paradigms in research are noted as pragmatism, interpretivism, positivism and critical realism (Creswell, 2013; Kankam, 2019).

It is essential for me to define my research paradigm in order to select the most appropriate research methodology for a particular study. In this study I adopted the interpretivist paradigm because it allowed me to explore the external world and lived experiences of the participants. Interpretivism research notes that reality consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world (Creswell, 2013). This paradigm is well aligned with descriptive phenomenology, a method that seeks to explore and describe, the lived experiences of individuals (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Based on the principles of interpretative phenomenological research (Quay, 2015; Clarke, 2010) notes how participants experienced and interpret their pathways to and through higher education through their lived experiences would be identified (Jackson *et al.*, 2018). When the objective is to interpret human experiences within a particular context, create meaning and interpret those experiences, interpretative phenomenology is most useful. An interpretivist approach is concerned with revealing and understanding trends, rather than the 'laws' of the

natural sciences. It deals with “action and behaviour generated from within the human mind” and is often closely associated with a phenomenological methodology, (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p. 4).

Thus, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed. Walsham (1995) argues that in the interpretive tradition there are no ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ theories. Instead, they should be judged according to how ‘interesting’ they are to the researcher as well as those involved in the same areas. They attempt to derive their constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest. Gephart (2004) argues that interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation, hence there is no objective knowledge, which is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. Matua and Van Der Wal (2015) argue that the premise of interpretive researchers is that access to reality (whether given or socially constructed) is “interpretivist” paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. They use meaning (versus measurement) oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges. This is the interpretive approach, which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action.

### **3.3.1 Ontology**

A key decision for an academic researcher is whether to adopt an objective or subjective ontology, based on how he or she perceives ‘reality’. An objective approach sees the world as consisting of tangible objects that can be measured: it is an approach frequently

adopted by natural scientists (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). A subjective approach, by comparison, regards reality as based on the lived experiences, perceptions and interactions of humans, particularly the research subjects and researchers (Coleman & Briggs, 2007). The nature of being is therefore based on those experiences, and ‘reality’ is shaped accordingly. Even when individuals experience similar events, every individual has distinct lived experiences, which lead to their sense of reality. Reality is contextual, based on perspectives, on social interaction and created by individuals. I have adopted a subjective ontology as best fitting the nature of the research project, which has explored lived experiences, and as my own experiences impacted how she perceived and described the lived experiences as shared by the participants. In qualitative research, the participants must bring their own perspectives into light to give meaning to various social issues at stake (Gray, 2014). The research participants’ experiences are embedded within the research process and not detached from it.

### **3.3.2 Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with knowing about something, the way we acquire knowledge and the way personal experience influences the knowledge acquired (Biesta, 2010; Creswell 2013). Epistemological approaches include pragmatism, positivism, critical realism and interpretivism.

Pragmatism is a paradigm that claims to bridge the gap between the scientific method and structuralist orientation of older approaches and the naturalistic methods and freewheeling orientation of newer approaches (Creswell, 2013). A positivist approach is based on proposing a theory or a principle, and then testing that theory or principle, and is therefore aligned with an objective ontological position. The Positivist paradigm maintains the belief that reality is out there



to be studied, captured and understood, (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). On the other hand, Critical realism takes the view that there is an objective 'reality' but that human perceptions are modified by our personal experiences and our inability to see anything beyond the present.

My epistemology is in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm because one of the aims is to understand the subjective world of human experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and so interpretivism is best suited as the research paradigm of this study. As it is used in this investigation, every effort is made to describe and understand the perspectives of the participants and how they interpret their experiences. It aligns with phenomenology, which seeks to understand the world through direct experiences and interactions. In the description and understanding of these experiences the epistemological issue concerns the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2011). My epistemology is based on the knowledge that is generated from lived experiences. Additionally, the subjective nature of human experiences in this study of young Saint Lucian males who would have accessed higher education point specifically to the knowledge created in that interaction. As the investigation is conducted, the question of the impact of social interactions in how knowledge is perceived by the young Saint Lucian males will be explored through their sharing (Slevitch, 2011).

### **3.4 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology as a qualitative method does not seek to "to find one single answer or truth but rather a coherent and legitimate account that is attentive to the words of the participants" (Pringle *et al.*, 2011, p. 23). What is significant in the use of phenomenology is to be able to capture and describe the phenomenon under investigation for each individual as part of this investigation.

Based on this, phenomenology was chosen as a qualitative methodology most suitable for my research on how the sample of young Saint Lucian male students at PIHL experience higher education. The use of phenomenological analysis which is concerned with identifying the features of phenomena and experiences, “has been influenced by the philosophical thinking of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty” (Banfield, 2016, p. 6), among others. It is widely regarded as significant in an individual’s way of knowing and making sense through varied experiences (Smith, 2011). Its use is appropriate to this study. A section below provides a more in-depth overview of the use of phenomenology.

### **3.5 Inductive Approach**

This research began with broad generalisations about the possible factors that would impact the progression of young males through higher education in Saint Lucia. Based on this inductive approach, data was gathered and conclusions drawn so as to give a description of the lived experiences of the participants. This contrasted with the deductive approach which focuses on the identification of a general statement with the aim at reaching a specific and logical conclusion (Bruner, 1990) This involved setting the research questions, gathering the relevant data via literature review and interviews, describing and analysing the data and finally forming conclusions. In the process of describing and analysing the data, Giorgi’s 5-step process (Giorgi, 2012) was adopted.

### **3.6 Research Objectives and Questions**

The research objectives and questions noted in Chapter One are identified below:

#### **Research Questions**

1. What factors may facilitate or hinder young Saint Lucian males

as they progress through higher education?

2. How do participants perceive and describe their experience of higher education in Saint Lucia?

### **Research Objectives**

By answering these research questions I will be able to meet the following research objectives:

1. To investigate the aspirations of young St. Lucian males who have enrolled in higher education
2. To examine and describe the experiences of young males in higher education in Saint Lucia
3. To evaluate issues that negatively or positively impact the perceptions of young males in higher education in Saint Lucia as they seek to complete courses of study in higher education
4. To highlight support strategies that can encourage and enable young Saint Lucian males to stay in higher education

### **3.7 Qualitative Research**

Several researchers argued against the polarisation of research into qualitative and quantitative paradigms (Ercikan & Roth, 2006; Wheeler, 2012; Leppink, 2017). The researchers point to the deficiencies associated with the separation and selection of one method over the other. Mixed methods are identified as possibly more meaningful in gathering data and coming to complete conclusion (Anfara & Merts, 2015). While the use of mixed methods was considered with respect to the general work and analytical objectives of the study. Ercikan and Roth (2006) recommended that novice researchers use an integrated mixed methods approach to educational research. However, for the purpose of this study, the use of qualitative

research offers the opportunity to focus on, and describe the personal experiences of the participants, thus capturing a deep understanding of the participants' description of their lived experiences as they progressed through higher education. Therefore, conducting qualitative research was more appropriate, particularly through descriptive phenomenological analysis (DPA).

Qualitative research seeks to emphasize the individual stories (Smith, 2011). On the other hand, "most quantitative education research, inferences do not generalize beyond the sample or contexts used because it is not feasible to conduct experimental designs or use random samples of students or schools" (Ercikan & Roth, 2006, p. 15).

Unlike quantitative research, the aim of qualitative research is not to simply generalise for the purpose of replication. The goals are also not to find absolute truths or achieve the total objectivity of the researcher (Silverman, 2011).

Qualitative research is an approach that is used for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals ascribed to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). It is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding the questions about the "what", "how", or "why" of a phenomenon rather than "how many" or "how much", which are answered by quantitative methods (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2009).

One advantage of adopting a qualitative approach is the ability to obtain information that can fill in the gap of research that has not been fully explored.

The aim of phenomenological research is to discover the qualitative ways in which people experience, conceptualise, realise and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them. It is important to note that every young male has had experiences that

can only be described from their own perspective and which have impacted their reality. In that regard, phenomenology is relevant as it distinguishes the individual outlook from that of a group and was selected as the appropriate method for this study.

An important part of this process is to consider the sociocultural environment of the participants important within the research context. Commitment and rigour include comprehensive research of the topic and a clear research methodology and mode of analysis. The concepts of transparency and coherence highlight the importance of following ethical procedures and having reflected on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings, Smith (2011).

Educational settings such as the institution of higher education, where learning and acquisition of knowledge occurs are conducive to phenomenological studies whereby the experiences of the students impact their entire educational journey.

### **3.8 Overview of Descriptive and Interpretative Phenomenology**

There has been some debate concerning the use of descriptive versus interpretive approaches to phenomenological analysis. Based on the principles of interpretative phenomenological research (Quay, 2015), how participants experienced and interpret their pathways to and through higher education through their lived experiences could be identified. When the objective is to interpret human experiences within a particular context, create meaning and interpret those experiences, interpretative phenomenology is most useful. Additionally, the interpretive approach is used to examine contextual features of an experience in relation to other influences such as culture, gender, employment or wellbeing of people or groups experiencing the phenomenon (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015).

Descriptive phenomenological analysis is an analytical method for linguistic descriptive data, for example in the form of written or in-

interview accounts, and Giorgi's (2010) methods are a popular form of such analysis. Descriptive phenomenology is best suited to studies with the goal of describing lived experiences. Descriptive phenomenology, an assertion specific to Husserl's philosophy, argues that experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific study. Most studies, which use the descriptive approach to research, are used to illuminate poorly understood aspects of experiences, Matua and Van Der Wal (2015).

The descriptive nature of DP aims "to find insights that apply more generally beyond the cases that were studied in order to emphasise what we may have in common as human beings" (Todres & Holloway, 2010, p. 178). This underpins the methodology and the method and why it is the richness of the descriptions of experiences that are paramount not the number of them.

The belief is that human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real, based on their experiences. People do not generally reflect on such experiences on a daily basis or even critically. With the use of descriptive phenomenology reflection can happen while identifying the essential components of the lived experiences specific to a group of people.

There are common features between descriptive and interpretative approaches. These are identified in the comparison below. In this study, descriptive phenomenology was used to explore the rich first-hand experiences of the participants. Descriptive phenomenology was used as opposed to interpretative phenomenology as it allowed me to have greater depth in engaging with human experiences and the significant value that these experiences have as they generate knowledge among young Saint Lucian males. Its flexibility and ability to capture and analyse the levels of data required. This flexibility inherent in the interview approach enhanced the probability of ob-

taining rich data (Creswell, 2012), which is identified in the experiences of the young Saint Lucian males.

Descriptive phenomenology, an assertion specific to Husserl's philosophy, argues that experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific study. Most studies, which use the descriptive approach to research, are used to illuminate poorly understood aspects of experiences, Matua and Van Der Wal (2015). Although, descriptive phenomenology is best suited to studies with the goal of describing lived experiences, yet it is important to note that the researcher is not actively creating or interpreting the phenomenon under investigation Slevitch (2011). The descriptions of the experiences as shared by the participants are meant to be free from of any influence of the researcher. However, this may be a difficulty for the researcher as individuals have their own bias. In this research I addressed this issue by seeking confirmation from the participants about my understanding of the experiences that they shared. This authentic and personal recount will further strengthen the descriptions.

The descriptive nature of DP aims "to find insights that apply more generally beyond the cases that were studied in order to emphasise what we may have in common as human beings" (Todres & Holloway, 2010, p. 178). This underpins the methodology and the method and why it is the richness of the descriptions of experiences that are paramount not the number of them.

#### Key Distinctions Between the Descriptive and Interpretive Approach

According to Wojnar and Swanson (2007, p. 176), there are key distinctions between these approaches:

##### Descriptive Approach:

1. The emphasis is on describing universal essences

2. Viewing a person as one representative of the world in which he or she lives
3. A belief that the consciousness is what humans share
4. Self-reflection and conscious “stripping” of previous knowledge help to present an investigator-free description of the phenomenon
5. Adherence to established scientific rigor ensures description of universal essences or eidetic structures

Interpretative Approach:

1. The emphasis is on understanding the phenomena in context
2. Viewing a person as a self-interpretive being
3. A belief that the contexts of culture, practice, and language are what humans share
4. As pre-reflexive beings, researchers actively co-create interpretations of phenomenon
5. One needs to establish contextual criteria for trustworthiness of co-created interpretations

The list of the features identified for interpretative and descriptive approaches gives an overview of the two approaches. Descriptive phenomenology is applicable to investigations that seek to describe lived experiences, as is the case with this investigation into the progression of young Saint Lucian males to higher education. It allows for the way in which individual people view their experiences to reflect their own sense of consciousness and their views of the world. Their self-reflection aligned with their previous knowledge contributes to how that experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and it is significant to this investigation.



### **3.9 Descriptive Phenomenology**

Descriptive phenomenology is viewed as a human science rather than a natural science, and so the relationship between subjects and objects and how things are realised and perceived is important (Giorgi, 2010). There are many ways of describing various experiences and this study explores how a descriptive phenomenological methodology is one way of getting to the core of a phenomenon through the consciousness of participants. Phenomenological research is about “going back to people’s specific experiences and letting the concepts come from there” (Todres & Holloway, 2010, p. 183).

### **3.10 Research Strategy**

Qualitative research relies on the detailed description of human experiences and assumptions on a particular issue (Saldana, 2009). It offers a number of research benefits, such as the use of subjective information, unlimited flexibility in definable variables, and in-depth examinations that warrant a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Saldana, 2009).

For the purpose of this study, interviews of young Saint Lucian males in higher education were used as the most appropriate tool to obtain the rich data required for the research objectives. Within that educational environment it is important to note those experiences are key to higher education policy and practice. Kahn (2013) notes that the learning experiences of students should foster reflection and in so doing allow individuals to go beyond technical reasoning and delve into exploring issues of social relations. The semi-structured nature of the multi media interviews allowed for a flexible way of conducting the interview and a better flow of the conversations with the participants.

### **3.10.1 Study participants**

In order to meet the study's objectives, the target group for study was young males aged between 18 and 30 years, who were currently studying in Higher Education in Saint Lucia. The target sample size of fifteen participants provided a good opportunity to collect rich data based on the participants' experiences. Alase (2017) noted that, for the purpose of phenomenological studies, a sample size could range between 2 and 25 participants. Depending on the availability of the participants and their exposure to the phenomenon this sample can provide data so that patterns can be established based on the lived experiences of the participants. Giorgi (2009) argues that, in his method of phenomenology, the research uses in-depth strategies, and not sampling strategies that rely on the number of people interviewed. What is important is that participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied, as is the case of the sample participants in this study. In arguing for more than the one 'self' experience evident in philosophy, Giorgi (2009) stated that multiple participants are needed for his method of Descriptive Phenomenology. It is important to note a vital part of any educational journey, is the responsibility of giving the participants a voice to express their experiences as individuals and as a collective.

### **3.10.2 Recruitment Process**

Initial presentation of the study and recruitment of male participants was performed via email from the institution's administration. This was based on the permission letter to conduct research gained through the office of the institution of higher learning. The administrative department sent out the information via email to male students, as I was not permitted access to the prospective participants in the first instance, as they were part of the school's database. This procedure was based on data protection protocols and the confidential nature of student information. The participants who expressed

interest were identified to me by sending me their email addresses and telephone numbers.

The ethics approval letter was sent to the Piton Institute of Higher Learning for their approval to allow me to conduct the investigation. Privacy was ensured as emails were sent directly to individual participants. In those emails the participant information sheet (Appendix One) as well as the consent forms (Appendix Three) were sent. The objective of the study, the process of data collection, the voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time were identified. The participants were asked to note that there would be no compensation for participation in this study. The use of the code, SLU and a numeral representing each young male were employed to increase anonymity.

Following that, I initiated the contact with the students who expressed an interest to take part in the interview by sending them messages via emails, WhatsApp and telephone calls. The sample was formed based on students meeting the selection criteria (male, aged 18 - 30, in St Lucian Higher Education) who expressed an interest.

The selection was based on the first fifteen individuals who agreed to participate and met the prerequisite of being male higher education students in the required age range. This number of participants allowed for a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and perspectives. The participants were sent a copy of the consent form and asked to sign it and return it. Based on their affirmative responses and consent, multimedia face-to-face interviews were conducted by me using Skype and WhatsApp video calling. All of the participants were asked for and gave their consent to the recording of the dialogue, which was done using a voice recorder. Each interview ended with a brief comment thanking the participant for his time and for sharing his experiences.

### 3.11 Participants' Data

Below is the overview of the study participants:

Code	Age range	Current area of study	Qualification in progress during research
SLU 1	25 - 30	Teacher Education	Associate degree in Teacher Education
SLU 2	18 - 24	Business Management	Bachelor of Business Management
SLU 3	25 - 30	Teacher Education	Associate degree in Teacher Education
SLU 4	25 - 30	Teacher Education	Associate degree of Teacher Education
SLU 5	25 - 30	Business Management	Bachelor of Business Management
SLU 6	18 - 24	Public health	Degree in Nursing
SLU 7	18 - 24	Mechanical Engineering	Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering at the PIHL
SLU 8	18 - 24	Marketing management	Associate degree in Business Management
SLU 9	25 - 30	Business management	Associate degree in Business Management
SLU 10	18 - 24	Business management	Associate degree in Business Management
SLU 11	18 - 24	Business Management	Associate degree in Business Management
SLU 12	18 - 24	Environmental Biology	Associate degree in Environmental science
SLU 13	25 - 30	Business	Business Management Degree
SLU 14	18 - 24	Education	Degree in Teacher Education
SLU 15	18 - 24	Hotel & Tourism Management	Associate degree in Hotel & Tourism Management

Table 3: Overview of Participants

An Associate Degree at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning is

awarded after 2 years' full-time study. This is the norm within the English Speaking Caribbean region.

As seen in the table above, in this study fifteen participants were interviewed. Of those, nine were between the ages of 18 - 24. This accounts for 60% of the participants. The remaining six aged between 25-30 years accounted for 40% of the grouping.

In summary, all participants were students of the PIHL who were studying for various diplomas or degree programmes at the local higher educational institution. One quarter of the participants had previously pursued first degrees at universities including the University of the West Indies Open Campus located on the PIHL campus and Ashworth College, an online institution. Of the participants who had university degrees, one had a further qualification of a post-graduate certification.

### **3.11.1 Research Site**

In 1985, the island of Saint Lucia, which is located in the Caribbean, saw the establishment of an institution of higher learning; the Piton Institute of Higher Learning. The physical environment is characterized by its visible military past. The many classroom settings and departments are located in refurbished military buildings that date back to the colonial period. Within that physical environment lie the many struggles of past individuals who would have laid down their lives for the development of the nation. Although this is important as a historical phase, its significance is not made prominent in the daily operations, activities, vision or the mission of the college.

Higher education is defined as education at a college or university where subjects are studied at an advanced level (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.) normally leading to an academic qualification. This distinction is important especially since the campus provides both further and higher education courses in diverse areas. Within the

Saint Lucian educational contexts, many students take diverse pathways to higher education, which has increased in prominence in the last twenty years.

### **3.11.2 Interview Content / Process**

The principal method used by phenomenologists to gain descriptions of experiences is the one-to-one interview (Finlay, 2014; Giorgi, 2009). The data collection method used for this study was interviews, that is Skype and WhatsApp face-to-face video calls. This method was originally used as I was away from the island on a work assignment. The use of multimedia interviews proved to be a valid alternative as it enabled me to elicit the thoughts, lived experiences and feelings of the research participants, and by so doing, enable the development of the understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences (King & Horrocks, 2010). The interviews progressed smoothly as the participants and I was able to establish a comfortable exchange soon after the initial contact. The participants all gave detailed accounts and incorporated some reflection on their experiences. The interviews were used to elicit narrative responses in relation to questions asked and the experiences that the participants wanted to share. Some of the participants shared incidents as experienced by other peers who were also at the institution of higher learning. The objective was to have participants reflect on their experiences and then relate them so as to create an understanding of the experiences and the meaning of the experiences. Additionally, interviews focused on the perspective of the interviewee and sought to reveal their beliefs, values, reality, feelings and experience of a phenomenon of progressing through higher education.

I used fifteen semi-structured interviews to collect data and get in depth information from the young Saint Lucian males. An important reason for this selection is that the semi-structured interview al-

lowed for further questioning and probing to elicit the experiences of the participants. Ritchie & Lewis (2003) supported this argument and noted that the use of the semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to further obtain additional information. Additionally, the interviewee may be better able to expand upon the ideas expressed.

All the participants interviewed in this study were asked to describe the experience while at the institution of higher learning. Participants were asked to further describe specific incidents that happened to them. Probing questions such as ‘can you tell me more about this experience?’ were used to elicit more information. It was important that the participants describe their experiences, and not necessarily explain it.

The semi-structured nature of the multi media interviews allowed for a more flexible way of conducting the interview and a better flow of the conversations with the participants. Those face-to-face multi media interviews were conducted using telecommunications media, namely Skype and WhatsApp. The ability to engage using non-verbal communication methods such as gestures and facial expressions contributed to the creation of a more relaxed environment. The participants expressed the ease with which the interviews happened, within an informal environment and relaxed manner that contributed to the sharing of their experiences. SLU 12 noted, “I did not have to get all dressed up for this interview.”

Since I sought to understand the participants’ lived experiences, the importance of pathways to higher education, barriers to progressing, support strategies and influence of individuals or groups, the semi-structured interview allowed for the participants to talk about their experiences of progressing to and through higher education. The use of semi-structured interviews meant that all participants were asked the same core questions. Further to those questions, additional in-

formation was sought to address the key issues in greater depth and detail (Miller & Glasser, 2011).

### **3.11.3 Data collection**

For reasons including the ease of communication, relatively low financial costs and the creation of a non-threatening environment, multimedia face-to-face interviews were used and made for optimum use of widespread current technology of Skype and WhatsApp video calling. The use of the video calls was effective, as the clarity and sound quality was very high yet not intrusive. Each of the participants had received a participant's information sheet (Appendix One) regarding the research project prior to the interview. They all consented to be part of the study and were not coerced in any way.

In addition to this I gave a verbal summary to each participant, explaining who I was and what my rationale was for doing this research. My progression to the point of the Doctoral programme was explained. I noted to the participants the qualitative nature of the study and had dialogue about the usage of data after the completion of the study. This dialogue with the interviewees influenced my reflection of the application of the research, once completed, in a practical way.

Prior to the formal interview, a few moments were taken to build a rapport with the participants and establish a comfortable and trusting environment. This was sustained as I actively listened and engaged with the participants and checked if I understood their points correctly. I used phrases such as 'based on what you have shared, I gather that', 'if I understand correctly you are stating that' or 'could you tell me more about'. This allowed for a semi-structured rather than a structured interview process as I had the option of asking to follow up questions and prompting the participants about the ideas that they expressed.



In addition to this a verbal summary of the aims and rationale of this research was shared with them, I explained to each of the participants that I would be using the data in a thesis, which could be publicly available.

### **3.12 Data Analysis Methodology**

Based on the interaction between the participants and I, experiences are retold and meaning is explored based on the manner in which those experiences have impacted the individual participants. The description of varied experiences and the qualitative research become a product of this interaction and relationship (Band-Winterstein *et al.*, 2014).

The traditional findings section of this paper will focus upon the DP methods used in the lived experience study. Psychologist, Giorgi (1994, 2009) developed the descriptive phenomenological method and this was used as the basis for this study.

Giorgi's method is based upon the early twentieth century philosopher Husserl's scientific approach to developing phenomenology. Giorgi's approach (2009) offers a robust process for analysing situated experiences that gives a clear insight into a phenomenon. The research involved semi-structured interviews, which facilitate the collection and description aligned with the descriptive phenomenology approach. With transcripts from several interviewees, similarities and common expressions can be identified across participant experiences so as to establish patterns.

### **3.13 Data Analysis Process**

Phenomenological analysis includes looking for common patterns within descriptions of the experiences of the study subjects. This concept was key to this investigation and demonstrated by the manner in which the data was collected. I ensured that the data was

handled with integrity during the collection and analysis phases.

Stake (1994) suggested that, while deciding on how to analyse the data, the researcher could adopt a lens that is influenced by personal experience, meanings and values. With this awareness and possibility, I was able to reflect on my own cultural lens and its impact on the data analysis. I am aware of the need to use this personal lens likewise, to set aside preconceptions and assumptions about the topic of investigation as I make sense of the whole data presented. My own professional experiences, as well as my cultural background can have an impact on the study. As a reflective researcher, this awareness is important to me so as to limit potential bias, throughout the study. My actions, and interactions with the participants as well as the recognition of the value of their experiences may influence the manner in which the study is conducted (Gray, 2014).

My past experiences, in particular with young males at the Secondary and College levels in Saint Lucia, had involved significant initiatives to ensure that they considered education important in their lives and future development. In many of these interactions the role of education had to be consistently identified as well as its possible positive impact. My interaction with the participants and the importance of their personal experiences formed part of my self-reflection during the study.

The analysis methodology followed Giorgi's 5-step process, described below:

#### Step 1: Concrete descriptions

The first step identified is to collect concrete descriptions or raw data, (Giorgi, 2012). Phenomenological research is based on the acquisition of concrete descriptions of the phenomenon under study. In this study the data was collected based on the lived experiences of the participants. In the previously identified, descriptive approach,

the emphasis is on illustrating the universal essence (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). In this study, the collection of data based on the lived experiences of the participants allowed for the concrete descriptions to highlight what was important to each participant.

### Step 2: Sense of the whole and (bracketing)

In this study, once the transcription of the interviews was complete, reading and re-reading the transcripts was necessary in order to get a sense of the whole. This was done within the attitude of phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2011; Giorgi, 2012). This meant, in practice, that firstly I was prepared in terms of being physically and mentally immersed in the research process when reading the transcripts. Secondly, whatever was given in the data is what was said about it. Thirdly, the adopted attitude (Giorgi, 2009) included special sensitivity to the specific phenomenon investigated. In practice this was listening to what the participant said and, even though it was the words on the paper that were being transformed, the voices of the participants were still evident in my mind. As in the descriptive approach, the participants are seen as able to represent their perspective as he lived it (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Through the study this opportunity to express those experiences was realised.

### Step 3: Creating units of meaning

This involved: creating the units of meaning that were identified in step 3; rewriting them; transforming them into everyday language and then employing the use of imaginative variation. By transforming meaning into everyday language, this emphasises describing the essence of the lived experiences articulated by the participants, (Giorgi, 2012). This step resulted in me being closer to what was said, rather than assuming what was said. This is an example of where the DP method is an independent method. It was a challenging task to get beyond hearing the participant voices when trying to

change the language being used in the identified meaning units. By creating units of meaning, a belief in the consciousness that humans share was directly linked with the descriptive approach (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). This study used the experiences shared to describe the participants' experiences that were relevant to their education journeys.

#### Step 4: Transformation – reduction and intuition

Giorgi described the step of transforming the meaning units as “the heart of the method” (2012, p. 6). The identification of the ‘meaning’ of what the participants had said during the interviews happened at this point. This required that transform the meaning units, which are in everyday language, through reduction, to reveal the characteristics of the experience. In the use of the descriptive approach (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), I reflected and minimized my use of prior knowledge to describe the units of meaning. In this study I checked my understanding of the data with participants and collated their experiences to identify emerging themes.

#### Step 5: Essential structure

The process of recognising and better understanding the constituents was an integral part of step 5, the eidetically identified essential structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012). Aligned with the descriptive approach, the study sought to adhere established rigor. This was to ensure that there was a description of universal essences or eidetic structures (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Step 5</b>
Identify and collect concrete descriptions or raw data	Transcribe interviews, read and re-read transcripts to get a sense of the whole with-	Create units of meaning that were identi-	Identify meaning based on the transformation of the units	Recognise and better understand the constituents as an integral

in the attitude of phenomeno- logical reduc- tion	fied and trans- form them into eve- ryday language	through re- duction	part of the structure of the phe- nomenon
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Table 4: The analysis methodology of Giorgi's 5-step process (Giorgi, 2011; Giorgi, 2012)

### 3.14 Interview Questions

My research investigated and described the participants' responses to the following questions, which the interviewees were then asked to expand upon. Additionally, they were given opportunities to express other experiences of their own as well that of other peers that they thought were relevant to the research.

- What was it like pursuing higher education in the Saint Lucian education system?
- What are the lived experiences that you had as you progressed through higher education?
- Can you describe the various pathways that you or your peers experienced into higher education?
- Describe any support mechanisms that were available to students.
- How have your experiences in higher education impacted your educational success?
- Why did you think that higher education would be of value?
- Exploring the experiences of young Saint Lucian males, how can others be impacted in higher education?
- What are the implications of those lived experiences for you?

### **3.15 Design Issues**

Creswell (2013) states that researchers need to be rigorous in their approach to design issues and analytic methods. The concepts of validity, reflexivity, generalizability and reliability are elements that play an important role in research.

This section reviews those concepts and identifies the basis for considering the semi-formal interviews and the phenomenological approach of this research.

### **3.16 Data Validity**

Punch (2006) defines validity as a complex concept. Addressing validity in a general manner, Cohen *et al.*, (2011, p. 179) noted that, “in qualitative data, validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved”. Content validity is most important in evaluating the validity of ‘concept-driven coding frames’ (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative researchers are not exempt from ensuring that concepts such as reliability and validity are taken into consideration during the research investigation (Smith, 2011).

Smith (2011) states that it is important for the researcher to have a clear focus and goal for the investigation so as to generate comprehensive data. I met this requirement by clearly focusing on the overall research objectives within each interview and during data analysis. Additionally, the identification of the units of meaning as presented in the data, elaboration and description of those units, and the analysis which includes the identification of various patterns, which are noted as important elements, were given due attention (Smith, 2011). Further recommendations, which were followed, included a level of sensitivity to the research process, transparency and coherence as well as commitment and rigour, and awareness surrounding the possible impact of the research (Silverman, 2011).

These elements of sensitivity and transparency were at the forefront my thoughts during interactions with the participants.

In the use of semi-structured interviews, data validity was enhanced by the use of a single interviewer and a consistent approach (Sousa, 2014; Bernerth *et al.*, 2011). Universal standards for assessing reliability and validity may not be suitable for assessing qualitative research such as phenomenology by using tools as a checklist, (Smith, 2011).

### **3.17 Data Reliability**

Reliability is a multidimensional concept. Cohen *et al.*, (2011) state that reliability in qualitative research is “essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of participants” (p. 199). This investigation was consistent in terms of the questions asked and can be replicated over time with a group of similar young male participants. This research data is reliable in terms of these interviewees in this environment and at the point in time when these questions were asked. Changes to these parameters would produce different data, for example conducting the same interviews with the same interviewees two years after graduation would produce different results and data.

An important part of qualitative research is based on the diverse human experiences as it focuses on the creation of meaning. This is formed based on the experiences and the understanding of these situations as well as, how they are interpreted by individuals (Merriam, 2015). Qualitative research includes the researcher as an active participant throughout the study. This includes the various stages of design, data collection and data analysis (Band-Winterstein *et al.*, 2014).

I understood that it was important to realise that, within qualitative research methods, there are different standards compared to quanti-

tative research, and so work to ensure quality and trustworthiness in the research (Smith, 2011).

The aim of phenomenological research is to discover the qualitative ways in which people experience, conceptualise, realise and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them. For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that every young male has had experiences that can only be described from his own perspective and which have impacted his reality. In that regard, phenomenology is relevant as it distinguishes the individual outlook from that of a group and was selected as the appropriate method for this study.

I noted the need to have a clear focus and goal for the investigation to generate comprehensive data (Smith, 2011). Additionally, the extraction of the themes as presented in the data, elaboration and description of those themes, and analysis, which includes the identification of various patterns, are noted as important elements (Smith, 2011).

An important part of this process is to consider the sociocultural environment of the participants important within the research context. Commitment and rigour include comprehensive research of the topic and a clear research methodology and mode of analysis. The concepts of transparency and coherence highlight the importance of following ethical procedures and having reflected on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings. Lastly, I reflected upon the impact of my social, practical, and theoretical contributions to the field of study.

### **3.18 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity relates to a 'thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched' (Finlay, 2014) and restraining oneself from imputing any preconceived ideas



to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As a qualitative researcher I was self-aware and reflective throughout the study (Flick, 2010). This reflective process is known as reflexivity and is the inclusion of my own actions and interactions as a researcher (Gray, 2014). By pursuing a reflexive attitude, I critically reflected on my possible influence on the research process (Gray, 2014; Jootun *et al.*, 2009).

Reflexivity is the acknowledgment by me that I am an active part of the research through the relationships and descriptions (Probst & Berenson, 2013). Throughout the interviews and data collection, I was aware of my background as an educator and community developer. I was able to empathise with the young male participants as they shared their experiences and make connections with other experiences that I had been told previously. This allowed for observing trends and patterns based on what was expressed. As a reflective researcher, I considered the ways in which my involvement with this study could influence this research (Berger, 2013; Finlay, 2014). For example, the dialogue with the interviewees about the future use of the research data and the study findings influenced my reflections on the applications of the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2010). The researchers reflected on how the findings of the study, once completed, could be used in a practical way to support young males in Saint Lucia who are progressing through higher education.

Reflexivity moves beyond personal reflections to include an exploration of the meanings that inform the research process, (Creswell, 2013). In this qualitative research, I was aware of my own perspectives and ensured I described the meaning participants conveyed to me about various social issues (Gray, 2014). This is of importance as I critically reflect on my own practice and my professional career over the past twenty plus years in education. For the most part this period has been dominated by interactions with young Saint Lucian males who are considered disadvantaged in one way or another. The

social issues which many of them face, and the impact on their educational life, was issues that I felt needed to be examined in greater depth and in a formal manner. My approach to this research has been to investigate the lived experiences that those young male participants face and give them an opportunity to express their ideas on higher education. In this awareness and acknowledgement of my role in this investigation, I chose to see “self-reflection as an asset” (Lichtman, 2012, p. 123) rather than a “drawback or limitation”.

### **3.19 Generalisability**

Generalizability, as Cohen *et al.*, (2011, p. 243) state, is not a “simple unitary concept” and the claims to generalizability or transferability need to be done with care. Although the explicit claim to generalisation cannot be made in this case, the objective is to contribute to the discussion on issues of young males accessing higher education in Saint Lucia. The findings can form a basis for policy discussion and used to represent the experiences of young males in Saint Lucia as higher education programmes are reviewed. As stated above in the section on reliability, this research data cannot be generalised in terms of other target groups and educational environments.

### **3.20 Chapter Conclusion**

For this study, I have adopted a subjective ontological position and an interpretivist epistemological approach in this study investigating and describing the progression of young Saint Lucian males as they progressed through higher education. The subjective approach recognises the importance of my own experiences as I engaged in the investigation and with the participants. The study also recognises that subjective meanings, a focus on detail and social phenomena help identify the reality of the situation and experience. The key research objectives have been identified to investigate and describe the experiences of young males in higher education in Saint Lucia.

This study was underpinned by the perspective that individuals' viewpoints are influenced by different ways their experiences impact their lives. Therefore, a qualitative methodology incorporating descriptive phenomenology is appropriate in this instance, as it is a school of thought that emphasises a focus on an individual's subjective experiences and how these become their personalised reality of the world.

In this qualitative research I focused on the interactions between individuals and the experiences that emerge from a real representation of lived experiences (Shaw, 2010). Descriptive phenomenology was the qualitative methodology most suitable for my research on how young Saint Lucian males' experiences higher education. Therefore, a relevant study sample, in terms of size and criteria was identified and recruited within a relevant research site: the Piton Institute of Higher Learning. A recruitment process, which adhered to data protection policies and privacy requirements was developed, the interview content and process developed and agreed with the college and the study supervisors.

Following Giorgi's 5-Steps process for data analysis provided the most sensitive, productive and accurate method to analyse the data emerging from the interviews. The process has been outlined above and the detail will be expanded upon in the following chapter. Questions of data validity, reliability, and generalizability within the research processes have been addressed, as outlined in the sections above, but the study makes no claims to generalizability for the reasons given.

A significant part of what constitutes phenomenological research is the explicit recognition that as a researcher, I am engaged in the act of understanding the lived experiences shared by the participants from the beginning of the research process to the end. Aspects of

self-reflection and sensitivity during this process, as the data was collected and analysed, remained important to me. I was careful to recognise her own experiences working within the educational system in Saint Lucia and her possibly preconceived ideas about the phenomena being studied, thus ensuring that the questions allowed every participant to express his or her thoughts.

An analysis of these experiences as expressed offered the opportunity of unique insights. These insights contribute to the body of knowledge about young Saint Lucian males as they accessed higher education within this educational and geographical context. For this research study, it is an exploration of a phenomenon that requires individuals to make meaning by describing those experiences. All of the participants in this study have had experiences that have equipped them with the capacity to share meaning based on their experiences.

The following chapter outlines the presentation of data from the primary research phase of the study.

## **4 Chapter Four – Data Presentation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings derived from the experiences shared by the Saint Lucian male students about their progression through higher education. The findings are based on the research questions that guided the study. During the investigation process, fifteen participants, all of them young Saint Lucian males of the Piton Institute of Higher Learning (PIHL) were interviewed for this investigation.

The nature of the interviews, which were semi-structured, had a degree of flexibility in that they were carried out in an informal relaxed atmosphere, involved open-ended questions and opportunities for the participants to articulate their experiences and expand on their answers. At the end of my set interview questions, I asked the participants if there was anything else that they wanted to share or add onto the previous experiences shared.

As detailed in the previous chapters, the use of phenomenological analysis is beneficial in identifying and analysing the emerging patterns in qualitative research. This was the case with the use of the semi-formal interviews within the phenomenological analysis. With this approach, an idiographic focus gave insights into how an individual has made sense of his lived experiences. Since the aim of phenomenological analysis is to give meaning to how the participants make sense of particular social phenomenon, the personal educational experiences of the young men are most significant to this investigation. It is important to note that phenomenological research is qualitative in nature.

In my data analysis, I present the key themes that have emerged based on the responses of the participants as they presented their perspectives. The themes have been analysed with the view of identi-

ifying the complexity and richness of the data. Based on the principles of phenomenological analysis, probable themes were obtained from the interview transcripts, (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Within each theme, additional detail will be provided to provide the reader with a better understanding of the participants' views and perceptions.

## **4.2 Emerging Themes**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the young Saint Lucian males as they progress through their higher educational journeys. Based on the experiences shared by the young males the following themes emerged out of those descriptions. With their progression through higher education, the participants reflected and shared their engagements and interactions, which informed all of their experiences. The themes emerged out of the various factors identified in the expression of those experiences and are aligned with the formation of meaning, (Giorgi A. *et al.*, 2017).

The themes that emerged within participants' responses are identified below:

- Perceptions of the value of higher education
- Aspirations for higher education
- Personal experiences
- Motivating Factors
- Other variables hindering progression to higher education
- Financing systems
- Support strategies
- Financial barriers

The themes are meaning units, based on the phenomenological analysis of the data collected, and were then analysed to produce the psychological meanings of the participants' experiences, in keep-

ing with Giorgi's 5- process (Giorgi, 2012). The factors influencing pursuit of higher education and support strategies available prior to and during higher studies to the participants were presented.

### 4.3 Subthemes

The sub- themes are based on the different aspects of each of the eight themes. The sub-themes are presented below and form part of the discussion of the findings.

<i>Emergent Themes</i>							
<b>Perceptions of the value of higher education</b>	<b>Aspirations for higher education</b>	<b>Personal experiences</b>	<b>Motivating Factors</b>	<b>Other variables hindering progression to higher education</b>	<b>Financing systems</b>	<b>Support strategies</b>	<b>Financial barriers</b>
<i>Sub-themes</i>							
Societal Perceptions	Distinction between one's thinking and that of others	Struggles/ Challenges	Resilience/ Grit	Priorities	Limited job availability	Lack of family support	Access to loans
The role and influence of parents	Family values of higher education	Participant's resolve	Determination	Limited accessibility	Qualifications	Negative peer influence	Limitation of financial resources
Social participation Network con-		Engagements with teachers	Confidence		Employment requirements Job security	Mentorship program Bursary	



nections facilitating advantage and mobility							
Collective advantages of an individual's social background  Parental expectations/family values		Supportive experiences	Strong and positive social relations with teachers and administrators				

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Below is an example of the data analysis of a sample of data from the participant interviews, based on Giorgi's 5-step method (2012). By this point I had carried out Step 1: to collect concrete descriptions; and Step 2: making sense of the whole through re-reading and maintaining the voices of the participants in her head to ensure sensitivity to the phenomena being investigated Giorgi *et al.*, (2017). The parts of the process displayed in the table identified the Units of Meaning (Step 3) and Emergent Themes (Step 4). The latter equate to the psychological meanings lived by the participants, as described by Giorgi *et al.*, (2017).

Participant	Unit of meaning (Step 3)	Emergent Theme
SLU 9	<i>"To be honest in St. Lucia having higher education doesn't really help."</i>	Perceptions of the value of higher education
SLU 14	<i>"I was never one of these people who was like oh I want to go to this college for sure."</i>	Aspirations for higher education
SLU 6	<i>"Ms () came at the right time, because I was really not going to come back again."</i>	Personal experiences
SLU 1	<i>"This motivated me to put myself in a position where I could help young men to see a different path...I created something positive out of a negative situation."</i>	Motivating Factors
SLU 8	<i>"I feel like that job security and availability is just as important as higher education."</i>	Other Variables hindering pursuit of higher education
SLU 11	<i>"some go through all these expenses and are still not able to get a job."</i>	Financing systems
SLU 12	<i>"since some young men do not get support from families, they turn to friends who negatively influence them and as a result are unable to stay in school, access higher education, far less find a job."</i>	Support strategies

SLU 2	<i>“the most applicable pathway for me for higher education was that, I had to work or get a scholarship to attend a university, my family just did not have the money.”</i>	Financial barriers
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Table 5: Sample of the Data Analysis Processing of the Participant Interviews

I identified and transcribed Units of Meaning and Emergent Themes to provide the psychological structure of the participants' experiences (as per Giorgi's Step 5). This is presented as findings below (Giorgi *et al.*, 2017).

#### **4.5 Factors that Influenced Decisions to Pursue Higher Education**

From the data collected, the conclusion was that, for most of the young males who wanted to pursue higher education in Saint Lucia, attendance at the main institution of higher education on the island was seen as the main and most accessible pathway for young male Secondary school leavers. Nine of the participants clearly stated that the decision to pursue higher education was made for them or by them during the schooling period in secondary school. This was based on discussions and interactions with teachers, peers, family members and members of the wider community.

In Saint Lucia, the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), which is the culminating examination in Grade 11 for all secondary students, is important for all further and higher education. This examination is a regional examination and used as a benchmark for the majority of Caribbean students. Prior to 1973, students wrote the Ordinary Level Cambridge General Certificate of Education (O-Levels) in the final year of upper secondary school. Established in 1973, CXC provides vital education services such as the development of syllabi, examinations and examinations administration. The Caribbean Exam-

ination Council replaced the O-Level examinations.

The young men interviewed cited the subject selection choices that were made in Grades seven and eight, as a significant period when they knew that they would be expected to continue their educational journeys after secondary school. *“This (going to college) was instilled in me while I was selecting the subjects,”* participant SLU 1 noted. He continued by stating that the teachers kept reminding the students that this selection of subjects was very important and that it going to affect them after secondary school in a major way. SLU 1 stated *“there were even lectures on this topic and talking about PIHL”*.

Participant SLU 13 explained that he thought higher education was the *“way of life”* for Saint Lucians who wanted to improve their lives. He went on to explain further that, [society] *“expects you to go to Secondary School, then PIHL, then maybe take a loan, get a scholarship or go to university... that is what they expect everyone to do in Saint Lucia... no one really deviates from that.”* It was his belief that society expected the students of higher ranked schools to go through Secondary school education, and then higher education.

The phrase, *“the college boys”* was used by SLU 13 to describe the boys of the highest ranked Secondary school. This Secondary school is a well-established, all male school. Based on the perception of SLU 13, *“college boys had little choice”* in pursuing education after Secondary School. Additionally, SLU 13 makes the link to development of social capital by noting that, *“the college boys seem to just get on with things... these guys were on a different level.”*

The data from Saint Lucia shows that, while this may be a societal expectation of some schools and groups, many students of the lower ranked secondary schools are less likely to have the same expectations expressed about them. SLU 1 made the comment, *“boy it is not what you know but who you know”*. This statement connects with

the ideology of social and academic capital that recognises the importance that social systems play within the wider society.

#### **4.6 Aspirations for Higher Education**

During the interviews, one third of the participants said that they had little or no aspirations to further their education after Secondary school. Participant SLU 14 claimed, *“I was never one of these people who was like oh I want to go to this college for sure”*. Participant SLU 10 noted that while he had a general idea of higher education, it was not something to which he gave much thought. He stated, *“It was not, really not, at the top of my mind.”* He explained that, although higher education was not part of his aspirations, he decided to attend PIHL as many other classmates had made the same decision. SLU 14 also explained that he was undecided at the end of Secondary school and that PIHL became *“the logical choice.”* He noted that, although he knew that his mother wanted him to attend higher education, *“I wouldn’t say that she was my main influence. She was just worried that I hadn’t decided on anything specific yet.”*

All participants agreed that it was fundamentally important to successfully complete higher education once an individual had started. In the response from SLU 9 he explained that importance by stating, *“these days almost everyone who wants to can try to move up the education ladder.”* SLU 5 also stated that *“not only the rich people can get a higher education, with the online courses more is available.”* In explaining why, he felt that he had no choice in completing his course of studies, SLU 2 stated, *“My mother worked too hard for me to mess up and not get everything out of it.”* This pronouncement highlighted his rationale to aspire to higher education and the academic capital that he understood could be derived based on the completion of his studies.

According to Participant SLU 3, *“when you are looking for an okay*

*paying job ... what they ask for is a first degree usually.*” He did go on to clarify that jobs are available for secondary school leavers in Saint Lucia and that many *“find a job.”* He, however, noted that in Saint Lucia experience alone is not always enough to get one a decent paying job; that this experience must be backed up with *“some sort of degree.”* Participant SLU 8 agreed but he did say that there were some skill sets that, while qualifications would be an asset, were not necessary so as to perform well. He cited an example of a family friend who worked as a photographer. He explained that his friend had developed this skill from a casual hobby while at the PIHL and honed it, after he dropped out of PIHL after the first year of tuition. In spite of dropping out of his course of study, his friend had become very successful and was considered *‘in-demand’* photographer for *‘big events’* not only for Saint Lucian bookings but throughout the Caribbean as well.

Participant SLU 15 explained that he had no ambition to further his studies after the Piton Institute of Higher Learning or another university. He cited two reasons. First, he claimed that, from what he saw around him, people who did not go to universities but started their own businesses were able to have more immediate success than those who took *“huge loans”* and went to universities. He argued that his own personal experience helped him to understand that having a degree was not a prerequisite to making *“good money”*. He claimed that he had gotten employment and made very good money although he had no formal qualification for the job that he was doing. He further noted that there were other persons with higher education qualifications working the same job as him, but these persons did not earn more than he did. He therefore concluded *“the fact that [Saint Lucia is] a developing country most people are not going to pay you only for your qualifications.”* *“You really don't get paid for all your qualifications,”* said SLU 15. *“So, you basically just*

*go through the hassle of getting an education to come back and get basically the same wage as someone who would just be there and gain that experience while working there.”*

#### **4.7 Perceptions of the Value of Higher Education**

One participant expressed that despite higher education being the expectation, it was not a guaranteed gateway to success to his mind. He cited his experience as evidence for his opinion: *“To be honest in St. Lucia having higher education doesn’t really help. All it counts for is you having higher education. It doesn’t really guarantee that you will get a job when you are done with higher education. Due to my experience here, that is how it normally is.”* (SLU 9.) He went on to explain that he had got a job placement at an insurance company despite a lack of higher education qualifications. His ability to get the job was based on the fact that the employer knew him. In that situation he noted that although he lacked qualifications at that time, he was selected.

As described in the previous section, SLU 15 offered arguments that there was limited value in undertaking higher education, and significantly higher costs, than moving into paid employment after Secondary school. On the other hand, participant SLU 3 offered another view, and noted *“when you are looking for a decent paying job ... the minimum requirement they normally ask for is a first degree ... there are exceptions, people who receive a job without having a degree ... I still believe that the majority of employers look for at least a first degree ... for a well-paid job.”* SLU 5 offered his ideas and noted that, *“the qualification will help me build upon my goals.”* Although he was not keen on accessing higher education during his secondary school years, SLU 4 also noted that he wanted to continue with his Master’s degree and *“so I need this qualification for my future plans.”* In highlighting the importance of a qualification and the value of higher ed-

ucation, SLU 1, expressed that, “*without that piece of paper, they do not even watch you*” during the employment seeking period.

Participant SLU 11 opined that the availability of well-paid jobs was elusive. He argued that those who go to university find it hard to get a job in their field. He further explained, “*I wouldn’t say [higher education] is a no because you can use that same education as a back-up plan ... but some go through all this education and are still not able to get a job [in Saint Lucia] or it is very hard in comparison to someone who went straight out of secondary school.*”

On the other hand, participant SLU 1 expressed the belief that higher education is important but, for those who lack the means for higher education, then they should seek to gain experience in the workplace. He cited his friend as an example claiming, “*I don’t think I would really have had to go to university to [to do that job] ... it is not that difficult ... it is important for certain things, but it is not necessary.*” Questioned about the job that his friend did, he stated that he had obtained a part-time job as an insurance agent. He continued stating that he was “*fine with this job at the moment because it paid the bills*” (SLU 1.)

Participant SLU 6 noted that it would seem that one accesses higher education only to be fitted into a job that does not match one’s educational pursuit. However, he argued that education is the key in gaining “*favourable employment*”. He did go on to say that perhaps one might not find employment in one’s own country, but that this should not be a hindrance to pursuing education past the PIHL level. Participant SLU 12 shared a similar opinion, arguing that higher education “*put[s] you at another level, above the rest*” but he too stated that this attainment did not necessarily mean that you would land a job that matched your qualifications or that it would make you rich.



One participant explained that as a secondary school student, he was already making money by working at a shop that did maintenance work such as boat and car engine repairs. This job experience provided him with the impetus to pursue higher education and a specific line of study, an Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering at the PIHL. He felt that although he had gained hands-on experience and was already “good” at his job, that the certification from PIHL would catapult him into working for “*licensed and recognised garages*” (SLU 7.) This impacted his decision to pursue additional studies.

One of the participants claimed no genuine interest in higher education during his secondary years. Although probed, he chose not to further explain and stated, “*No, I didn’t have ambitions to that*” (SLU 4.) Participant SLU 10 admitted that he was not too interested in higher education but he did express that he was not uninterested either. He continued to explain, “*I did have a general idea of higher education ... [but] to be honest, I [didn’t] think too much about it.*”

Three of the fifteen participants stated strongly that attending the PIHL was generally what was expected of students who were successful at the end of secondary school. Of the three participants, one claimed that it was after he began attending PIHL, he became interested in his course of study, but that attending PIHL was never on “*his agenda*” and continuing his education was “*a decision that was made for [him]*” by his mother with limited consultation with him. This participant claimed that the decision to continue his education was non-negotiable due to family expectations.

Participant SLU 5 stated, “*You still need that qualification, that degree to be able to get a good job to better yourself, to change your life ... or to be able to support a family ... especially for men*”. Upon further prodding, he went on to explain, saying: “*the women are taking*

*over ... they have most of the good jobs and the degrees ... and we men are just behind ... [The women] are so independent that they don't even want to be with men ... we need to be the leaders and the heads ... that is why I want to become that man."*

Based on the data collected, the participants noted that higher education, but more specifically attendance at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning, was expected of young Saint Lucian men. They felt that the pressure increased in terms of meeting this expectation for young males who attended the "top" and more established secondary schools of the island and those who families "pushed for it." (SLU 10.) Participant SLU 2 echoed the sentiments of many of the participants when he opined that even if you have no or little money, "you go to secondary school then PIHL, then work and then maybe back to university in another country."

#### **4.8 Motivating Factors**

The participants acknowledged that their dreams and aspirations for higher education were influenced by various factors. The various factors include intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, their personal experiences as well as other factors based on family and societal values reference higher education attainment and aspirations.

#### **4.9 Intrinsic Motivation**

Ten of the fifteen participants claimed that intrinsic motivation played some role in the aspiration to higher education past secondary school. Participant SLU 2 explained that from Grade six [he] knew that he wanted to pursue this goal [of obtaining a bachelor's degree]. This thinking continued to be part of his secondary education and the choices that he made during that time.

Participant SLU 1 stated that his drive stemmed from his desire to support young men and to help make a positive impact on the lives

of other young men within his community. He went on to describe a violent encounter with some young males who attacked him and a friend. Although this was an unfortunate incident, he felt that it was the moment when he reflected on the direction that his life was taking based on the individuals as well as circumstances that he had chosen to interact with. This situation was a deciding factor in him enrolling at the PIHL in the Division of Teacher Education. *“This motivated me to put myself in a position where I could help young men to see a different path ... I created something positive out of a negative situation.”* (SLU 1.) Based on that *“sad day I made a turnaround,”* he noted.

The experience of watching his mother work hard to support his family positively impacted SLU 3 in that it motivated him to pursue higher education. He noted, *“working to the bone for so little, I knew there was a better way.”* He went on to explain that he wanted to offer a different future for his own children, *“if I have them.”*

#### **4.9.1 Extrinsic Motivation**

Six participants, namely SLU 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 12 stated that it their desire to make money and be more financially stable more than other factors such as parental or societal pressures that influenced them to further their education. *“I wanted to make money and start a family,”* noted participant SLU 12. Without money it is difficult to *“lead a household,”* he continued. Participant SLU 6 noted a similar reason, claiming that he *“wanted to be successful and want[ed] to provide for a family of [his] own.”*

However, the decision to access higher education at the higher education level was more of a personal reason with the males who were interviewed, citing the need for financial stability. The great desire was to be able to afford a *“good life”*, (SLU 5.) Another participant, SLU 8, noted, *“you have to take care of your business”* and that *“no*

*one can do that for you.*” In his explanation of the reasons why he may not accept financial help from a parent or the government, SLU 14 pointed to the sense of obligation for the support received. He noted, *“Sometimes they want you to pay them back because they helped you.”* Another point was made by SLU 9, stating, *“you have to help your younger sisters and brothers, you have to give back.”*

#### **4.9.2 Personal Experiences**

Outlined here are some examples of the personal experiences that had influenced the participants to enter, or to continue with, higher education. Other examples covered aspects such as entering the work force and then opting to continue with their education.

Participant SLU 11, for example, explained that he had a friend who got support completing the application form for a book bursary and that his friend got the books for the year free of cost. This in his opinion was instrumental in keeping his friend at his studies. He noted, *“that really helped him stay at [The PIHL].”*

Participant SLU 6 related the experience of the encouragement that he got from his Communications lecturer at the Institute of Higher Learning (PIHL). He explained that he was having difficulties paying for the second semester and thought of dropping out. He said that he went to the Counsellor for advice, but she was out of office for two days. He then spoke to the lecturer who gave him some practical advice about getting financial support from a charitable organisation. SLU 6 recounted the situation and said that, *“I was just not coming back after I did not have the money to pay. Ms came at the right time, because I was really not going to come back again.”*

Participant SLU 12 noted the support from a bus driver on the school’s route that would allow him to pay his bus fare at the end of the week. This arrangement helped him get to school from his home on a daily basis. He noted, *“I did not have to worry about getting to*

*[The Piton] in the morning. The driver picked me up from my home.*” This service, he explained, ensured that he was always regular and punctual.

#### **4.9.3 Other Factors Impacting Progression through Higher Education**

In this section, I will discuss other barriers that prevent young Saint Lucian males from accessing higher education. The barriers identified by the interviewees include the perception that Saint Lucian degrees lacked the value of degrees earned overseas, a lack of employment opportunities in Saint Lucia for those with degrees in many disciplines, the pressure on young men to become “*bread winners*”, and a lack of feedback processes and support services.

At the end of their interviews, several of the participants reiterated that access to higher education was very difficult for Saint Lucian males. Loans and scholarships allowed for some to enter the realm of higher education, but in my view there are not enough loans, scholarships and bursaries to allow all who are interested in furthering their studies to find access to university education.

Participant SLU 3 suggested that if Saint Lucia had its own universities and colleges that were “*on par with those available overseas, then perhaps more young men would be able to afford a university education.*” To those who can afford to go overseas for studies, Participant SLU 8 opined that there might be limited opportunities for employment in Saint Lucia on their return. He noted that Saint Lucia does not have the capacity “*to be able to hire people with exotic degree.*” “*If someone gets a degree say in biochemistry, Saint Lucia needs to provide them with a job suitable for that degree otherwise they will go somewhere else. I feel like that [job security and availability] is just as important as higher education.*” SLU 2 totally agreed with this viewpoint.

Some of the participants noted the limited contribution students could make to the higher education environment as a variable that hindered accessibility and progression. SLU 1 comically noted, *“They don’t even have a suggestion box to give you an opportunity to give feedback!”* SLU 9 expressed the opinion that there was no formal interaction with groups such as the Student Council about the programmes presented. He noted that the Student Council is *“only asked to take part in events”*, not in the substantial parts such as *“courses and the programmes of PIHL.”* He lamented the lack of any meaningful opportunity to be part of a consultation group that could give relevant feedback on the important aspects of the institution. Additionally, SLU 14 expressed in relation to student involvement in the decision making about the courses *“we may have ideas to share but no chance”* to do so. SLU 13 spoke of an incident where a local bank had come to present possible financial opportunities through a student loan arrangement. He explained that although many students came, there was no feedback afterwards although attempts were made to contact the bank. He noted, *“even when they asked for your input, they do not follow up.”*

Seven of the fifteen interviewees believed that higher education for males were not appealing because males have been socialised to believe that males need *“financial stability at a young age if he is to secure a mate.”* (SLU 7.) Some expressed the view that this was the reason why many young men did not study at PIHL and even fewer accessed other university programmes because they are too busy becoming entrepreneurs or securing work at entry level. SLU 10 noted, *“the guys are busy looking for jobs”* and trying to get their own businesses *“off the ground.”*

Four of the previously mentioned seven participants believed that lack of structure in their homes caused the young men to become bread winners early in life to fill a void left by absent fathers or fa-

ther figures. *“Well in some instances the [males] don't have fathers to show to show them the way. They might follow what they might see other older men doing ... they fall short or fall victim to the usual trap which plagues Saint Lucia.”* (SLU 4.)

The participants were also of the view that young men who become self-employed possessed skills that may have been enhanced by higher education studies. SLU 6 explained that a young male friend started a *“VIP transfer business”* for affluent clients and developed a business relationship with the reputable hotels. He noted that the friend was able to draw upon the knowledge that he had gained doing the business management degree at the PIHL and so noted, *“Studies can pay.”* Ten of the fifteen participants spoke about successful persons that they knew who did not further their education past secondary school or who did not even attend a traditional secondary school and were now successful in a range of business areas. Participant SLU 1 expanded and spoke of a peer who attended a secondary school where subjects like plumbing and carpentry are taught:

*“I remember he was driving and he was boasting about how his business was doing so well. This proves to me that having skills is important. We should have more schools that provide skills like CARE [Centre of Adolescent Renewal] that boost the students to provide them with those skills. There is even this CVQ program that the Ministry [of Education] offers. If we would invest more into this field, we would encourage people to become more active and use their hands to create work for themselves instead of being a liability to the government or their parents.”*

One of the participants claimed that in many aspects of Saint Lucian society, a first degree is a necessary qualification for a *“good paying job.”* A common perception of the participants was that, while those

without higher education may find it difficult or near impossible to find success in traditional fields like working with the government or even the private sector, it was those people with little to no education who would become entrepreneurs. They would then become more financially stable than those with higher education who would have years of student loans to pay off. Participant SLU 11 argued that education could be a “*back up plan*” in case one decided to do something else, but he stressed the importance of being “*your own boss*.” Participant SLU 9 was of a different view, claiming, “*it does put you at a cut above the rest ... I believe that experience could only bring you so far, but the education brings you further*.” According to these participants, the benefits of higher education were not just a degree or certification in a particular field. Participant SLU 14 noted:

*“I mean it's necessary to get better at anything and to really understand what you are going into and understanding the world around you. This is a major importance of higher education ... like going to another school or going to another place to study is like the experience itself introduces you to something more than just the education but ... a better social understanding. Because you are exposed to different cultures and different people in comparison to where you came from. That in itself teaches you so you get more street knowledge as well as the actual [knowledge] in the books. Also, you get the opportunity to network and that's really helpful when it comes to becoming successful in whatever you choose to do.”*

#### **4.9.4 Financing Systems**

Two of the participants explained that for their studies at the PIHL, they worked for two years in an effort to save funds that would be needed to secure student loans. Although the student loans were secured, the two participants both acknowledged that the amount of



money needed and paid back based on the interest rates would impact them financially for many years afterwards. This was enough to make them hesitant in accessing these funds for the chance to attend university, with the burden of a student loan to repay. Participant SLU 11 summarised this argument by saying, “*some go through all this ... and are still not able to get a job,*” and advised that all who seek access to higher education should firstly weigh the pros and the cons very carefully.

One participant (SLU 13) remedied the problem of finance by accessing student loans at the local credit union institution. However, this participant went on to state that even when the loan was granted, the prospect of paying back thousands in loan payments over several years and the huge possible debt were enough to have one seriously reconsider accessing higher education. He stated, “*I may have just gone to work*” and been “*better off.*”

SLU 3 noted that financing his higher education was only possible “*with sweat and hard work ... my mother could not give any hand-outs, I had to work too.*”

According to Participant SLU 13, “*People expect[s] you to go to Secondary School and then PIHL, take a loan if you can’t afford.*” However, taking out loans was not an option available to all and he cited the limited bursaries and scholarships that were available to students at the PIHL. He explained that the scholarships were difficult to apply for and for those that were lucky, “*it was just a drop in the bucket.*” He continued to state that most of the guys could not afford the bus fare to the city and that “*hiking to town was a daily adventure.*”

Financial support for students at the PIHL targets those who have the academic potential but are unable to meet the financial obligation of higher education and according to Participant SLU 11, this

access to funding *“can help save a young man or two from ending up on the street as a criminal.”* He noted that especially those that really have the *“brains but not the cash”* so as to access higher education.

#### **4.9.5 Support Strategies**

The availability and access to support strategies such as family, educational, community and peer support were identified as important to the participants.

#### **4.9.6 Family Support**

Participant SLU 6 cited *“[his] mother as the most influential at pushing”* him to go to higher education and then getting *“serious about his own life and future.”* Participant SLU 9 agreed stating that his mother was *“the one who motivated [him] from [a] young age ... She planted that seed in me and then I also wanted it for myself.”* SLU 2, as previously described, stated, *“My mother worked too hard for me to mess up and not get everything out of it.”*

Participant SLU 8 agreed, stating that *“my parents were the biggest factor in encouraging me ... my parents both pursued higher education [and] I could see all the options they could give me, so I want that for myself as well.”* He continued that he felt he must give back to his parents by becoming financially stable and helping them in *“their old age.”* Participant SLU 8 stated that because of his family he always knew that he must pursue higher education. Not attending higher education was never a consideration. *“[Not attending university] was never on the table for me, my parents made sure of that.”*

Participant SLU 14 highlighted his family as a means of support. *“If from young your parents ... or even extended family ... see you going astray, and they check on you from the beginning and they instil the right morals in you ... you ... will want to push through [to school].”*

Participant SLU 9 spoke of his sister's attendance at the University of the West Indies as the catalyst for his decision to attend higher

education, stating that because she had already read for a degree, that he *“also felt like it was required of [him].”*

Participant SLU 5 expressed that he did not have a personal family experience that he could have had turned to but that seeing other students who came from good family backgrounds succeed influenced him to *“be like them or even better than them.”* This then became his motivation to get a university degree.

Participant SLU 12 argued that, since some young men do not get support from families, they turn to friends who negatively influence them and as a result are unable to stay in school, access higher education, *“far less find a job.”* He continued his argument by saying that based on his experience, the lack of a strong family structure where fathers or strong male role models were present created a *“sort of break down in the family,”* especially if the mother was forced to work long hours, away from her family and the young men were literally forced into becoming providers for their families at a very young age. Thus, in his opinion, higher education became an elusive aspiration for young men from what he described as *“marginalised homes.”* SLU 3 supported this viewpoint with his views concerning the role of single mothers, lack of male role models in some families, and the additional challenges that such a family situation presents.

#### **4.9.7 Educational Support**

Apart from the one participant who deliberately pursued higher education because of his job as a mechanic, the other participants claimed that the education that they got from the higher educational institution did not always match the demands of the real world. If students are *“unable to see the use of what they are learning, then they will not be interested in what is being taught,”* argued Participant SLU 15 forcefully. A support system where the males are mentored may help them see things from a different perspective and this

may help them access higher education and remain enrolled in higher education, further expressed Participant SLU 7. He explained that this would help the *“other guys to see the importance and go to school.”*

Participant SLU 4 cited certain teachers as the reason that he stayed at PIHL. Participant SLU 1 said that he wanted to become the “sort of support for young males that he received during his studies at PIHL.” He suggested a *“big brother”* programme as part of the student leadership and student support services. Only two of the fifteen participants stated that academic staff was a support mechanism that they could have used during their time at the higher education institution. SLU 4 noted that he trusted his professor who always wanted *“the best future”* for him and would always *“check on him.”*

This participant also argued that the higher education system itself did not help males stay in school and that the teaching strategies and interaction used by the PIHL faculty *“did not get to the level of the males,”* meaning that the male students failed to find relevance and a connection with the teaching content. He noted an example of what he thought was unreasonable project work as one way in which the interaction can negatively impact student desire to complete their studies. Based on his expressions Participant SLU 12 thought that the education system disadvantaged the males and if the males became disenchanted and dissatisfied, chances are that the males would *“drop out from school and become menaces to the society,”* thus strengthening the notion that males are *“underachievers”*. That limited participation of Saint Lucian males in higher education, and the negative effect it has, was supported within the findings. For some of the participants they saw and reinforced the link between the pursuit of higher education and a decrease in poverty and crime levels.

#### 4.9.8 Community Support

A participant noted the need for a system to identify at risk students early, and support them by making counselling and other support systems available that they might need to keep them at PIHL. SLU 3 highlighted his secondary education and a programme titled, “*Each one, reach one*” that worked as a big buddy system. Older students volunteered to be a mentor to younger students by helping with homework, projects, porting competitions among other things. He explained that he was both mentor and mentee and benefited very much from this system. He stated that it was “*one of the most important things that kept me going until the end.*” He suggested that a similar programme would help students at PIHL.

Participant SLU 12 spoke highly of the influence of his church community, and his spiritual leaders, as a source of both financial help and motivation to complete his higher education studies. “*The church was always there for me, providing school books, transportation money and free tutoring ... the pastor would check on me.*”

#### 4.9.9 Peer Support

For many of the participants, the time at PIHL can “*be hard*” (SLU 3). The difficulties expressed were based on teaching curriculum and teaching engagements that the participants felt did not always meet their needs. SLU 7 noted, “*these teachers do not get it sometimes.*” He went on to explain that the lectures and delivery of instruction was not “*relevant to real life*” and that many students did not see the long-term benefit to “*be there [PIHL].*”

The Participants SLU 6, 8 and 13 stated that positive pressure played a major role in remaining and choosing a positive pathway. As SLU 3 stated, “*the fellas start networking soon as they get to PIHL.*” Additionally, SLU 7 expressed that this networking and building of social capital was due to the perception that, “*the guys are*

*looking beyond PIHL*” and that “*those guys know people out in the world of work.*” SLU 6 pointed to the formation of supportive groups, which he expressed, could be selective by stating that, “*you saw the college boys helping and sticking together.*”

Additionally, the participation in on campus activities such as student council, a drug free club and study groups helped them progress and contributed to their goal attainment. SLU 8 explained his feelings about the support received from his peers and noted, “*at first when the guys said that we should have a study group, I was like, what?*” He continued to explain how this study group over a period of a year became his most important support and that together with the other guys, they “*all made it.*” SLU 2 explained that although some of the “*guys come with much better CXC scores,*” he saw them supporting others with “*fewer good grades.*”

#### **4.9.10 Financial Barriers**

Nine of the participants cited lack of finances as the main reason that it was difficult to pursue further and higher education within the Saint Lucian educational environment as well as internationally. Many participants noted that although PIHL was subsidised by the government of Saint Lucia, they still felt that PIHL was expensive for the average individual and “*normal families.*” (SLU 6.) For many participants, the financial commitments could be met by themselves, their parents or extended family. This major financial commitment and “*strain on the entire family,*” according to SLU 4, made it more difficult to access university education in their areas of study. According to Participant SLU 2, “*the most applicable pathway for me for higher education was that, I had to work or get a scholarship to attend a university, my family just did not have the money.*”

Participant SLU 2 continued that it was the receipt of a scholarship that allowed him to further his education citing that “*it would have*

*been very difficult for me to go to university even after [I] had saved up during [my] 2-year work period.*” Participant SLU 5 went on to further underline the financial strains, stating that lack of paternal support and involvement caused hardship, as his mother was the sole breadwinner. *“Growing up as a child you need support and guidance and I didn’t have that. I only had my mom and she was barely there. Because she had to work all the time to provide for us to ensure that we had a good education.”*

In the case of participant SLU 3, his mother was barely able to provide secondary school education from very early on and thus a barrier to higher education was created from that time. He identified the *“struggles that she went through”* so as to provide the basic needs to her family and that *“my father was nowhere to be found.”* He stated that she worked a *“split shift”* at a hotel where she worked both the early and late shifts.

Participant SLU 8 opined that lack of information about the kind of funding and financial support available at PIHL was a barrier to many students. He went on further to state that *“unless you’re actively looking for [information] you are going to miss it.”* He expressed the disappointment there was not an explicit service session that allowed the students to get that information and know of its availability. He further stated that not only was it hard to get the information on time and that sometimes the time *“window between the posting of the information and the time to get all the documents required was unrealistic”* At times *“it seems like they don’t want you to get it. I tried to apply for part [scholarship] ... I didn’t have enough time to get all the documents in order.”* As a result of this barrier SLU 5 noted that he sought full time night employment, so as to realise his dreams and aspirations for university qualifications. He noted that he had to *“take it hard”* in order to make the money to *“survive during that time.”*

In response to the financial barrier, participant SLU 8 stated that he had to work for one year prior to accessing higher education at PIHL. Although this route was not his first choice, he was able to work to finance his education. It became the best option that he could afford as he was not able to terminate a monthly salary in lieu of attending school full time.

#### **4.10 Summary**

In this chapter the participants allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences that negatively and positively impacted their higher education. The qualitative research methodology, phenomenology was used in identifying and analysing the emerging patterns based on the lived experiences shared by the participants. The use of the semi-formal interviews with the fifteen participants presented key themes that have emerged based on the responses of the participants as they presented their perspectives. The key themes identified were the aspirations of young Saint Lucian males for higher education, their personal experiences prior and during higher education, their perceptions of the value of higher education, and the factors that motivate their participation in higher education. Additionally, some the motivating factors, the variables that may hinder pursuit of higher education, the support strategies available to the participants, possible financial barriers and the financing systems were all noted as emerging themes. In the next chapter, the implications of the findings will be discussed.



## **5 Chapter Five - Discussion of Research Findings**

This thesis investigated the perceptions of young Saint Lucian males based on their lived experiences as they progressed through higher Education. Drawing on the literature presented in this study, this chapter will present a discussion on the research findings. In addition, this chapter discusses the limitations to the study.

### **5.1 Implications of the Findings**

In this study I examined the experiences that young Saint Lucian males face in progressing through their higher educational journeys. The work of Bourdieu (1993) formed part of the theoretical underpinning of this investigation. The specific focus is placed on social, academic and cultural capital. The findings of the study highlight the importance of those forms of capital as they impact the experiences that students have had and their ability to successfully manoeuvre through their studies. In this study I described the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males within the educational environment. These interactions were part of, and contributed to their perception as well as descriptive manner of their lived experiences. Based on the work of Bourdieu's an integrated theoretical framework, which is relevant to the study, enhanced an understanding of the everyday experiences of the participants.

In this study the gap in literature as it pertains to the higher education progression of young Saint Lucian males was addressed. For the purpose of this study, it is significant to note that every young male has had lived experiences that contributed to the development of their own perspectives, which have impacted the way in which they perceive higher education opportunities and limitations. These perceptions then became their reality about higher education. It must be noted that the participants in this study were all higher education students. Therefore, their contributions are based on their per-

sonal circumstances and perspectives, at the time of interview, pursuing higher education.

For the purpose of the investigation, the research protocols and procedures were followed and adhered to. The major themes that emerged from the investigation as the young Saint Lucian males described their lived experiences as they pursued higher education were:

- Perceptions of the value of higher education
- Aspirations for higher education
- Personal experiences
- Motivating Factors
- Other variables hindering pursuit of higher education
- Financing systems
- Support strategies
- Financial barriers

These themes represented the various elements that impacted the progression of young males through higher education in Saint Lucia. The themes emerged as meaning units, aligned with the phenomenological analysis of the data collected. The analysis of those themes was based on forming meaning of the participants' experiences, in keeping with Giorgi's 5-step process (Giorgi, 2012).

With the use of semi-structured interviews, statements and responses by the participants sometimes covered more than one unit of meaning or spanned more than one theme (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Where there were links or cross-references across the themes, I have indicated them. The findings of the study are significant as the lived experiences of the participants are described and given meaning in their higher education engagement.

## **5.2 Aspirations for Higher Education / Perceptions of the Value of Higher Education**

The investigation findings have revealed several incidents whereby the aspirations of young Saint Lucian males to higher education and their perceptions about higher education were closely linked. For the purpose of this section, the two themes have been combined to reflect the synergy identified, which points to a correlation rather than a distinct difference. Based on the findings, the participants supported, that many young men could not adequately contribute to the economic and social development of the country; nor could they develop personally if they do not have the necessary higher education skills. This was supported by the work of (Lewis, 2013) who noted the limited contribution of young males to social advancement.

From the data collected, the conclusion was that, for most of the young males who wanted to pursue higher education in Saint Lucia, attendance at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning was seen as the main and most accessible pathway for young male secondary school leavers. This is despite the opportunities available via the University of the West Indies or studying abroad. Some of the participants clearly stated that the decision to access higher education was made for them or by them during the latter part of their secondary schooling period, which ended in Grade 11.

The findings of the study support the need to decrease the number of young Saint Lucian males that are visible on the streets and in public spaces, as the young men noted that those who aspired to higher education as more likely to be meaningfully engaged.

The participants noted that they aspired to remain in higher education once they had started the process and supported the assertion that it was important to recruit and retain all young males in higher education (Fisher, 2015).

Widening participation in higher education among the young Saint Lucian males was noted as a way in which to spur human growth and thus become a critical factor of the nation's development (Louisy, 2004). This finding is in contrast to the perception that many young Saint Lucian males are presumed to lack the prerequisite skills and attitude needed to firstly access and then to succeed in higher education by taking on the presumed challenging assessment practices of higher education. Based on the findings I noted that the young Saint Lucian males are aware of the need to widen their participation and benefit from their higher education by setting themselves academic goals.

Higher education has the potential to offer personal opportunities for national and economic growth Jules (2008). Although some participants supported this, others expressed that success in one's professional life was not assured by higher education attainment. The example of successful prominent businessmen who have no or limited higher education qualifications was identified as examples where people did not need such qualifications. Based on the ideas expressed by some of the participants, not having those qualifications did not hinder the progress of those individuals nor prevent them from earning well. In some cases, they agreed that earning money in the context of male-breadwinner ideology is a symbol of contemporary masculinities (Plummer *et al.*, 2013). Observing and interacting with individuals who were able to become economically stable without higher education qualifications reinforced this perception.

Based on the findings of this study, the participants supported that the increase participation of young males in higher education can raise higher education attainment by individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds (Tilak, 2002) and so influence widening participation in a strategic and positive manner (Watts, 2006).

Additionally, the point was made that on completion of higher education in Saint Lucia, young males may still be unable to secure employment both in general and in their field of study. The notion that employment was most important was reinforced and directly linked to the ability to provide for a family, thus supporting that the concept that masculinity in the Saint Lucia context impacts the perceptions of young males (Abbot & MacTaggart, 2010; Plummer *et al.*, 2013; Stockfelt, 2013). Although the participants noted the importance of working in general, they were keenly aware of the need to have a professional-level career (Berry *et al.*, 2011, p. 14).

On the other hand, participants noted that higher education qualifications are basic to gaining employment at a minimum level. The expectation of economic gain and a possible career advantage contributed to the positive attitudes towards higher education and were seen by the participants as an outcome and a benefit of higher education. In addition, some participants expressed that many employers will not consider an application without such qualifications. This is in contrast to some of the participants who noted that there were instances of businessmen who had achieved success without having a higher education qualification. The perception that attainment of a higher degree was not a prerequisite for success in the individual's work life was reinforced and illustrated the point made about many uneducated Saint Lucian workers who may have acquired wealth without higher qualification. Some of the participants saw a direct link between an aspiration and the knowledge and skill development that one could gain by completing higher education. This was supported and seen as a significant step to ensuring that the higher education course was meaningful, added professional value and was relevant to the employment market (Conger & Long, 2010).

Additionally, the importance of widening participation and allowing students to see higher education as a reality was strongly supported

(Attach, 2010). They contended that higher education was more accessible to the masses and not seen as exclusive to an elite few, thus reflecting (Watts & Bridges, 2006) argument about influencing the purposes and perceptions of higher education. This perception on the part of the male students in HE is, of course, in conflict with the statistics for males accessing HE in Saint Lucia, as the perception of wider accessibility is not reflected in higher male student numbers. Therefore, the remaining barriers pursuing Higher Education take on a greater significance.

Participants stated that young Saint Lucian males who are considered marginalised come from the working class or are considered 'at risk', who would not have traditionally aspired to higher education, could benefit from improved higher education opportunities as noted by Tilak (2002). They agreed that access of the working-class students to higher education would improve their contribution to society and allow for other members of their families and community to aspire likewise. In follow-up questioning during the interviews, the concept of cultural capital was discussed and participants agreed with Bourdieu's (1993, 1996) linking of enhanced education with cultural capital. By observing and being part of the positive impact that higher education could have, more young males would generally, aspire to higher education and remain in these enrolled courses. The direct benefit to those graduates would be better employability and a greater positive contribution to society, expressing support for the arguments of Harper (2012).

Some of the other participants perceived higher education to be an important tool for their own personal growth, and noted that it would increase their economic status and that of their nation. They aspired to higher education and noted that successful completion could diminish educational and social inequalities, in accordance with findings on this topic from the literature review (Strohl, 2006).

Attainment of higher education qualifications was seen as having a direct impact on reducing social issues and keeping young males engaged in a more productive manner, thus building social capital in the development of relationships among various stakeholders. The participants expressed that the rigours of higher education could be seen as unnecessary in some cases but agreed that an education is generally associated with a way out of poverty, as stated by Mooney (2000) and important to achieve a professional career in agreement with arguments reviewed in the literature (Plummer *et al.*, 2013; Stockfelt, 2013; Watts & Bridges, 2006).

### **5.3 Motivating Factors**

The participants expressed that many factors motivated them to aspire to higher education. Some of the participants identified their own internal desire to improve upon themselves (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015), their family life and their communities as a major motivator. A significant part of this motivation is self-determination (Newman *et al.*, 2014) as influenced by the cultural experiences and environments of which individuals are a part. The desire to adequately support a family financially, based on the benefits perceived to be associated with higher education attainment, was seen as very important to the participants. Additionally, the environments and cultural experiences that individuals are part of was agreed as a contributing factor to self-determination and motivation. The participants agreed that those experiences could encourage or discourage young Saint Lucian males as they seek to attain higher education. The family structure and background were identified as part of this cultural experience.

One of the key influencing and motivating factors, as noted by Harper (2012) was supported in the findings. The family played a key role as a support strategy and in the same way, a strong motivating

factor. The influence of parents and families play a stronger role and gives young Saint Lucian males a push to succeed by gaining higher qualifications and offering a way out of poverty. Parental influence also has a great effect on young men in steering them towards thinking about the expectations and benefits including economic gain. The strong, positive parental support and commitment to education can have the effect of mitigating some of the negative effects, which may be associated with being in a lower socio-economic class. This would explain why, despite having lower socio-economic class profiles, some of the participants identified their aspirations to higher education and the enhancement of social capital through the establishment of relationships within the higher education environment. The art of social networking and social capital development that could be enhanced by accessing higher education was supported as a way out of poverty (Payne, 2014).

Similarly, to the support strategies, the paternal support was specifically noted by the participants and supported in the literature by (De Lisle, 2015) who note that fathers are a central figure in the educational success of their children. Additionally, lack of a cohesive family structure, which values education, and the absence of parental guidance were seen as demotivating factors. As a result, one's social background, including the value attached to higher education was a factor that could motivate the participants (Posner, 2010).

The possibility of positively impacting others was also a form of motivation. More specifically, the possibility of supporting immediate family members such as a parent so as to give them a better life was important. The participants agreed that motivation is significant factors in the consideration of higher education. They noted that it is vital that young Saint Lucian males internalise higher education as a means self-improvement and so engage in behaviours that will support that goal. The choice made further contributes to an indi-



vidual's social importance and capital.

Also noteworthy was that, in keeping with Figueroa (2009), extrinsic motivation, in terms of financial gain, a salary or a tangible reward was seen as fundamental to how higher education is perceived. Some of the participants expressed the desire to earn and become more financially able as a significant factor to their pursuit of higher education. Based on that desire, the need for higher education qualifications was emphasised and the recognition that formal qualifications can play a major role in career advancement and better employment (Conger & Long, 2010). As a consequence of the higher educational qualifications, cultural capital was identified as important in educational interactions and a way in which a student could get advantages in the world of work.

The possibility of networking and establishing relationships during the higher education period and the realisation that it can lead to long-term gain was identified as a motivating factor and a contributor to academic capital (Bourdieu, 1993). For the participants who came into higher education with significant prior educational achievements, their progression was seen as more likely. With their specific capabilities and the willingness to access higher education, they were motivated to increase their knowledge. Therefore, higher education further contributed to their academic capital.

#### **5.4 Personal Experiences**

The experience of the receiving positive encouragement from faculty members in the face of academic and social challenges was noted as important to some young Saint Lucian males. These particular behaviours towards the young Saint Lucian males made the difference between them continuing to pursue higher education or deciding to discontinue their course of study. Getting support from a professional office such as that of a guidance counsellor or concerned lec-

turer contributed to the positive personal experience.

Explaining personal experiences and relating that of peers identified the impact that such experiences had on the reducing the barriers that young Saint Lucian males encounter. These included getting access to resources such as books, educational materials and other services such as transportation to continue along their educational journeys. This is in support of Chowdry *et al.*, (2013) who argue that factors that are economic in nature including getting the necessary basics such as transportation or school materials, can negatively impact the progression of young Saint Lucian males to higher education. This barrier can be major as the participants noted that it made a difference in the lives of many students and the choice to remain at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning

Although Plummer *et al.*, (2013) noted that Caribbean males, which include Saint Lucian males, have been identified as acting ‘macho’ in their approach to getting support in the education, this was not supported in the findings of the study. Young Saint Lucian males noted their interest in and aspiration to higher education. There was heightened value placed on higher education.

Based on the experiences shared by the young Saint Lucian males, many students wanted to avail themselves of higher education support mechanisms. Based on the findings, financial support was not rejected based on perceptions of cultural norms about masculinity, but they were actively sought and needed by the students.

## **5.5 Financial Barriers / Systems**

The findings of the investigation placed explicit significance on the availability of finances, the ability to gain access to funding and the impact on progression through higher education. This has contributed to further discussion with reference the other themes and connections identified.

In a small nation state, like Saint Lucia, many males have found short-term work earning wages or generating income for their families. In spite of the instability associated with irregular sources of funds, some males contend that higher education would not significantly improve upon their livelihood as noted by Cobbett (2013). This is also based on the examples as stated by the participants of business personalities who have, in the public eye, become successful without having acquired higher education qualifications.

The majority of the participants highlighted that although young males in Saint Lucia have a high level of interest in higher education, the lack of finances was one of the main reasons that progression through higher education was not a consideration or possibility for many young men. The findings identify finances as a major barrier of young males as they access higher education, but it could not make an explicit and direct link to their social class as an influence on their ability to fund their higher education.

The support and intervention of the family was seen as crucial to gaining financial support to the point that many families would pay for higher education in a range of ways. These included saving up for it and accessing financial systems. Direct payments made by the family members also carried with it a responsibility to the family and a high level of accountability. Social debt in terms of the giving back to parents or extending that responsibility to other family members was seen as a financial responsibility and barrier. The feeling of having to pay back in some tangible or intangible way was noted as a possible deterrent by some participants. Others felt that it is important to give back when one has received financial support.

The limited number of scholarships and bursaries hinder access to higher education. For many young Saint Lucian males, the process of applying for these scholarships and bursaries lacks clarity and is

supported by systematic procedures. The requirements, time line and criteria can create further issues in terms of accessing those services.

Securing loans from various banks and other financial institutions is also a barrier for young Saint Lucian males. This is based on the repayment structures that can be extended over a long period of time and impose a commitment over many years. This finding is directly connected and supported by the claims that males from lower social backgrounds having more difficulty in accessing higher education due to lack of finances Stockfelt (2013). Although the concerns about student finances are a valid challenge for many young Saint Lucian males, it was not seen as a significantly greater disincentive to apply to higher education. The effect of the family's social background, specifically the parental socio-economic status and parental experience, also played a role in negotiating that barrier. Additionally, the added responsibilities of providing financial support to aid the running of a household which was noted by the participants is another factor that allows one to see why the pursuit of higher education would be secondary to meeting basic needs.

The reality of not having the funds with which to pay for courses meant that some students found themselves experiencing issues that they would otherwise not have had. Among several examples, SLU 6 cited how close he came to dropping out of the course, had it not been for intervention from a concerned staff member. Their personal experiences, however, highlighted the difficulties that they faced with the bureaucracy surrounding accessing these services and availability of such services.

In the instances where funds and the access to funding were probable, the prospect of paying back to financial institutions at high rates proved to be a barrier to many young Saint Lucian males and

their families. Based on the quandary associated with financing of basic needs such as food, shelter or clothing for a family, the probable gains of higher education of higher education coupled with the financial commitment may remain unattainable.

Many participants noted the lack of financial resources of their families as a major barrier. Many families were not able to make such commitments to the young males as they struggled to provide their own needs. In support of this finding, Watts and Bridges (2006) noted that in the considerations after compulsory secondary school life, working class students might choose to work rather than further their studies. The findings of the study supported the feeling of being pressured that young Saint Lucian males feel as they are expected to contribute financially to their families (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). Additionally, Reddock (2009, p. 13) states that it is not surprising that “many low-income households and young men themselves yield to the temptation to drop out of school in order to earn a living.” Although this was supported by the experiences shared by the participants, they also noted the need to earn as core to the possible completion of their studies. There were a number of reasons given by the participants why they should access higher education, but frequently identified was improvement in the labour market prospects, including a specific career, a better job, or a better paid job.

Although higher education in Saint Lucia may not be seen as commercialised, the finances play a major role as a barrier. The economic activity of small nations such as Saint Lucia would therefore have a direct impact. The findings supported this connection that economic activity and growth are explicitly connected to higher education and so socially and politically important (Stockfelt, 2013). The difficulties that single female households face and the absence of a paternal engagement (Walker, 1997) support the idea that working class households have more difficulty accessing higher education.

Additionally, those students with fewer educational qualifications than their middle-class contemporaries will continue to have significantly fewer opportunities to make use of them in progressing to and through higher education. As a student progresses through higher education, the financial expectations may become more intense and can impact the educational journey. The participants supported this as they noted the extra financial pressures as they progressed through higher education.

The cost of studying in higher education was seen as impacting the perceptions of accessing higher education. The concern of having to earn while studying, the high possibility of getting into debt, and having to manage on a low income during that time were all factors. Additionally, the acceptance of financial aid from a parent or family member was seen as creating an obligation and further expectations of support and incurring social debt.

## **5.6 Support Strategies**

The support strategies identified during this investigation cover a range of themes, some of which are intertwined with other variables. The availability and access of support strategies such as family, educational, community and peer support were identified as important to the participants. These had a direct impact on the decision to access, and remain in, higher education. The research findings identified the impact that family members had on the young males, to the point that they expressed having no choice but to pursue higher education. Those personal qualities of family members that include an individual's attitude towards the higher education environment all contribute to social capital. In this case the social interaction and value associated with the benefits of higher education decreases the issues of social elitism (Watts, 2006).

In the research that Harper (2012) has done with young males, the

role of the parents as a support network has been identified as most significant. This was supported by the research findings that also emphasised the pivotal role that parents play as well as the possible negative impact that their values can have on young Saint Lucian males as they progress through higher education. By creating a culture within the family that embraces higher education, young Saint Lucian males are more likely to see it as a non-negotiable aspect of their lives. Those family values would be also visible during the secondary years. The explicitly expressed desires of their parents (Harper, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013) were that higher education was non-negotiable or there existed other social pressures to access higher education so that they could take care of their responsibilities to themselves and their families.

These decisions were based on discussions and interactions with their teachers, peers, family members and members of the wider community who encouraged their participation. The participant responses therefore support the judgement of Harper (2012), among others, that the impact of family expectations on an individual's choice in pursuing higher education is high (Ridley *et al.*, 2005; Whitehead *et al.*, 2006).

The role of the family in nurturing values surrounding the importance of higher education is highlighted (DeRose *et al.*, 2018) and can be an inspiration. The young Saint Lucian males supported this as they shared the positive influence about how the higher education values of their families impacted them. However, the support services of family members, and in particular that of fathers, was noted as significantly lacking by some participants.

Another significant part of the support system was seen as financial help from parents in particular and the increase feeling of social debt. The participants noted the support of parents as they funded

higher education was a positive initiative. Some also saw it a means of allowing them to take greater responsibility for others in the household and family members, thus increasing the positive perception and family expectation of higher education within a family.

A support system where the males are mentored to help them see educational attainment from a different perspective and get valuable support from other individuals who have achieved a high level of education was a strong recommendation. This is also supported by research that emphasises this (Harper, 2012; Stockfelt, 2013). Additionally, there is a strong view that young Saint Lucian males need a strong male presence so as to ensure discipline, teach respect and learn about being a man. In the absence of this, the participants support the claim that, “young males may seek negative role models” (Reddock, 2009, p. 14).

The need for structured student support as proposed by Harper (2012) was supported in the findings of the study. The need to strengthen youth organisations such as the Student Council and Student advocacy groups that are present on the campus was identified by the participants. These groups were seen as integral to creating a culture of support by engaging with a diverse group of students and so identifying the areas of need with the view of providing solutions to the issues raised. In such a grouping, young males can generally find common aspirations and benefit from peer initiatives (Harper, 2012; Reay, 2012). These set structures can provide opportunities for young Saint Lucian males who are academically successful to engage in leadership roles. At the same time, these men can offer authentic support, as they would have faced similar issues. Having a structure such as Student Council in place at the higher educational institution would afford the young Saint Lucian males a feeling of being valued, a formal avenue for discussion, feedback and allow them to voice their ideas. This is important as a source of sup-



port that pushes other male students to social and academic attainment (Sullivan, 2002). The data revealed a strong perception amongst the participants that the voices and ideas of young Saint Lucian males are not taken into consideration within the discussions of access to higher education in Saint Lucia. The absence of all opportunities to evaluate the programmes that are on offer, to give feedback on the relevance of the courses to the labour market and the lack of engagement with the corporate sectors are all identified as factors that Institutions such as PIHL must review and reflect on the strategies that identify the relevance of its programmes based on the needs of its students

It is important to get the faculty to recognise and support individual students who are struggling with various issues as they progress through higher education. The participants noted the assistance given by the lecturers and the initiatives that they used to extend their help. Initiatives such as the encouragement of study groups were seen as particularly relevant. Other initiatives that promoted mentorship in a formal or informal way were seen as relevant to the ideological objectives of improving higher education access. Lewis (2013) and Plummer *et al.*, (2013), who supported this also highlighted the importance of strong male role models who could offer guidance and support. This system would enhance the ability of young Saint Lucian males to identify experienced individuals who would act as their mentors in times of difficulty as supported by Reay (2012). The relationships that were developed and cultivated with educators would offer support in both formal and informal ways, thus contributing to the successful engagement with education at all stages. In particular, the young African American males who may be less inclined to recognise the value of higher education can benefit from developing and cultivating positive relationships with education stakeholders (Harper, 2012). This addition support system can lead to more en-

agement and create the environment whereby the young men use the resources to enhance their education.

Some participants identified the lack of or limited paternal support. They noted the impact that this family situation would have on their educational pursuits and aspirations as reflected in daily personal experiences. These included access to higher education resources such as materials, financial support and the pressures attached to finding employment before accessing higher education and throughout that journey. The absence of a father figure and limited emotional support during higher education was expressed. Noting the prerequisite of successful completion of secondary school so as to access higher education, this point supports the findings of the study and the impact that this can have on young male students. It is impossible to argue with Bailey (2004) that an actively involved and engaged father or male role model can not only provide financial support but also create an emotional bond with a young male that can reinforce academic pursuits.

Another support strategy was identified as employment during the period of the study. Part-time and even full-time employment were used as a way to decrease the financial burdens so as to allow the young Saint Lucian males to access higher education and take care of other responsibilities while studying. This option of employment was identified as important to some participants. Other participants worked prior to studying so that they could save some money and decrease the pressures while completing their work.

## **5.7 New Knowledge**

In this study, the experiences that young Saint Lucian males face as they engage and progress through higher education was investigated. This is important to note as currently there is limited research done on the articulation of young males within the Saint Lucian

higher education system and so the findings of this research qualify as new knowledge. The young Saint Lucian males got the opportunity to express and articulate their lived experiences and so derive meaning from those. The participants in the study experienced higher education within an educational environment where social relationships and interaction was significant to the importance placed on teaching and learning. The influence and impact of those social relationships extended to family and higher education educators. Those relationships proved vital in the lives of individual students as they faced challenges and provided the support needed to continue along their higher educational pathways. Based on the experiences the participants were able to identify factors that influenced or limited their success along their journeys. A major factor expressed was the need for consistent access to financial resources as part of the higher education support network. Additionally, the relevance of the teaching and learning strategies based on the relevance to the needs of the students was described. This connected well with the input of higher education students and the importance to recognise that they have a voice in the structure and engagement during their higher educational journeys. The lived experiences and the way in which humans describe meaning were significant elements as noted by (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This investigation gave young Saint Lucian males in the study a voice to express their experiences within a hierarchical education system that has limited student input. Tight (2012) suggests that higher education remains a relatively under-researched area, but I would note that some such areas are highly researched while others, in particular the Saint Lucian and Caribbean region, might not be. In the case of limited higher education access by young males in Saint Lucia and the extent of public attention it receives, it is perhaps surprising just how little documented and published research focuses on progression to higher education

institutions in the Caribbean.

In this investigation, I drew on my years of experience as an educator who was highly involved with many young Saint Lucian males and their families during the latter part of their Secondary school life and entry to higher education. The students were generally those from a lower socio-economic background and those who had been identified as having a lower educational attainment. During those interactions the desire to pursue higher education was not noted by me as a priority by the young males. This led to a perception that higher education may not have been a goal that many aspired to. This investigation provided new knowledge as the findings identified that many young men perceived higher education to be significant in their growth and saw the practical importance of it in their professional and personal lives. This information has led to my reflection on the research and a change in mind-set. Additionally, I reflected on the factors that can contribute to further enhancement of the desire to pursue higher education and what systems can be used to increase the successful completion of higher education.

The participants saw a direct link between an aspiration to higher education and the knowledge and skill development that one could gain by completing higher education. This was seen as a significant step to ensuring that the higher education courses were meaningful, relevant to the labour market and added professional value that translated into tangible benefits, in particular financial benefits. This is supported in the literature by Tight (2004) who noted that there is need for socially disadvantaged young males to identify and pursue educational attainment with a goal in mind. This knowledge and the evaluation of higher education based on these criteria would provide a platform for further discussion and the creation of programmes that are meaningful to young males.

Based on this investigation, new knowledge is presented in this study through the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning. The findings of the study confirmed that some young Saint Lucia males do aspire to access higher education. However, the barriers that are present in terms of accessibility and their ability to afford higher education pose a challenge. Understanding the specific challenges faced by young Saint Lucian males is important, for them as an individual and for the nation. The study brings new knowledge by providing information on these challenges as perceived by the young Saint Lucian males themselves who share their experiences and those of others with whom they have interacted.

The new developments in the economy reference the availability of employment and the skills / knowledge needed must be given due consideration. Reviewing the academic programme will bring changes to processes, procedures, and student engagement, which can provide more opportunities for male enrolment. This is an area that local policy makers should develop a long-term approach to, not only to increase male enrolment but also to improve on the quality of the programme offerings.

Engagement with young Saint Lucian males so as to give them greater visibility and allow for the expression of their views is vital. This is one area that can impact policy and practice within the higher education environment in Saint Lucia. Policy initiatives include matriculation requirements as per the entry requirements into higher education. A specific example is that of providing a summer program so that students who missed out on a particular subject or requirement may be able to achieve those prior to the start of the course. This is directly related to the provision of alternative pathways to higher education by affording students opportunities to select and complete various certificate programs or units within a

course. The availability of a mentorship program that offers support of a mentor can further aid students in areas of difficulty such as student interviews as part of the entry process. This can be pivotal in the selection of courses based suited to the interest and goals of the student.

Based on the findings of study, specific policy interventions that will impact young Saint Lucian males in their pursuit of higher education are proposed. The financial assistance programme is one such policy that can make this service more accessible to students. The application process can be facilitated online to address issues of confidentiality and ease of access.

The findings also note that financial assistance can be offered as a loan with a payment plan, to encourage students to further value their higher education while also paying their way through.

Education should give students the confidence to be competent individuals in their outer world based on social reproduction and their inner world of self-actualization (Reay, 2012). The research on young Saint Lucian male participants who had accessed higher education reflected the principles of engagement with young males, so as to highlight the unique experiences of participants who have experienced higher education and so can describe this phenomenon. Offering more in-depth lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males adds to the limited research conducted within institutions of higher education in the Caribbean about males in higher education. The use of descriptive phenomenology research methodology provides a more in-depth understanding of those experiences and personal accounts. It opens a pathway to conduct further research on this issue. As a novice practitioner researcher, conducting this study allowed me to learn and grow as a researcher.

## 5.8 Limitations of this Study

In all research, there are limitations that impact the investigation. The faculty could have provided in-depth data of their experiences over a number of years, based on the young Saint Lucian males that they would have worked with, thus identifying common and consistent themes over a long period of time. That historical overview and experiences of such key stakeholders could provide a different perspective and valuable information to the discussion on the progression of young males within the higher education sector in Saint Lucia.

The decision only to interview those individuals who were already in a higher education institution is also a limitation. Although an attempt was made to include students who had not previously accessed higher education or dropped out of higher education, so as to identify the barriers that prevented their pursuit, it was not feasible. This was due to the ethical approval process (Appendix Two), which included a major additional time factor. The experiences of those who may have dropped out during their higher education studies could have provided meaningful data.

In the case of this study, a small sample provided in-depth data, (Cremades *et al.*, 2014). Although the number of fifteen participants may be considered small, the data that I collected was meaningful and provided new insights into the experiences and perceptions of young males. The sample size may be considered a limitation for this study. This small sample size may have affected the ability to generalise the findings of the research, as the sample may not be representative of the entire male higher education student population.

One of the limitations of the qualitative case study approach as identified by Miles *et al.*, (2014) is that because it treats the phenomenon under study in real life context and in depth, the relatively small

number of participants normally used may or may not represent a reasonable sample of the larger universe (p. 15). Therefore, the findings of this research might not be generalizable.

Another limitation is that of relying on only qualitative data. In this investigation, the use of narratives can draw out aspects of the individual's feelings and thoughts (Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) but can be seen as subjective or even too emotional in the sharing of experiences. The use of qualitative research offered me the opportunity to listen to the experiences of the participants and go beyond statistics (Watts, 2006). Statistical data may also provide further insight into this issue and may be used for further research.

## **5.9 Summary**

The implications within the educational environment that were drawn from the investigation and its impact on policy were identified and discussed. The findings of this research qualify as new knowledge in an area with limited research. The young Saint Lucian males got the opportunity to express and articulate their lived experiences and so allow me to get information specific to the Saint Lucian higher education context, thus creating meaning. The importance of consulting with young Saint Lucian males and including them in the further development and evaluation of higher education programmes within the Saint Lucian context was noted. Finding the connection between the academic offerings and the corporate expectations in the world of work formed part of the discussion. The short and long-term implications for practitioners and policy makers were taken in consideration. The opportunities for further investigation and the limitations of the investigation were discussed. The conclusion of the study and the information gathered will be presented in Chapter Six.



## **6 Chapter Six - Conclusions**

The study was conducted at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning and did not take into consideration the other higher education institutions on the island, most of which are United States registered medical institutions. My motivation to conduct this research study at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning was due to my work environment in the Saint Lucian education system as a teacher and administrator. Over a period of twenty years in school environments, I have noted the various social and educational issues that young Saint Lucian males experienced and developed an interest in researching young males in higher education and in so doing allow them to share those lived experiences.

It was important for me to undertake a research project that would serve a purpose within the higher educational environment. Consequently, working with the young Saint Lucian males in an ethical manner was important. For the study, the participants agreed on, and in many cases drew upon their own experiences of, the impact that a strong individual or small group of individuals can have on the pursuit of higher education. These individuals and the values that they identify are an important factor in the goal of widening participation of young Saint Lucian males in higher education and the far-reaching impacts.

In order to extend this impact, it is important to make higher academic skills more accessible to many individuals and not a selected elite or privileged group but a socially inclusive group (Altbach, 2010). This is particularly relevant in a developing nation such as Saint Lucia, which can gain considerable growth with an increase in the number of students accessing higher education and a system to mass accessibility and progression to higher education (Bowers-Brown, 2006). In spite of this increase in access, the group that is

being research remain underrepresented.

This explicit input was the focus of the study. The thesis has focused on identifying the ways in which young Saint Lucian males negotiate the barriers that they face when progressing to higher education. By giving the young Saint Lucian males an opportunity to share their experiences, their unique lived experiences were examined. It is significant to note that these lived experiences have been shared, analysed, and described so that education stakeholders will be able to grasp the information shared. The findings of this study can impact educators and policy makers within the higher education environment in the Saint Lucian context.

The results from this systematic study matched the anecdotal reports of Saint Lucian educators that I have interacted with over a period of years. It reflected the social interaction of the young Saint Lucian males as they place meaning on their experiences through their individual attention. Knowledge is therefore constructed by the participants' interpretation of information based on their past experiences, cultural background and personal views.

The work of Bourdieu (1993) underscores the importance of the various forms of capital. The work of Pierre Bourdieu's noted an integrated theoretical framework that is relevant to research that seeks to understand the experiences of everyday life (Power, 1999).

Based on the findings, elimination or reduction of the financial barriers would improve progression of young Saint Lucian males in a significant manner. A decrease of the financial barriers and the long-term commitments associated with its financing would contribute to a wider group who would consider higher education and participation of males from lower socio-economic strata and social class. This is important, as the research has noted a general aspiration to higher education, among young Saint Lucian males and the perception

that if such barriers were removed, there would be much wider participation in higher education. Several participants identified this positive attitude among the participants and the identification of the benefits of higher education.

Parental influence has been noted as an important factor that can have a great effect on young Saint Lucian males applying to and progressing towards the completion of their studies. The families who value higher education and articulate this to young Saint Lucian males are an influential source of motivation. This is the case despite the high probability that many parents may not have attained higher education themselves or come from a perceived lower socio-economic background. Although the significance of socio-economic class, family or social background play a role as factors that influence entry to higher education, the participants noted that family values can be more powerful in the decision making about higher education.

As the young Saint Lucian males responded to factors that impacted their progression to and through higher education, the role of the support systems was identified as important. The presence of role models Lewis (2013) in the form of educators, community leaders or family was noted as a significant in the aspirations that the young males expressed. These aspirations were highlighted as influenced by the role models; they were dynamic and based on social changes, (Stockfelt, 2013) which if sustained could have a lasting impact. The insights gained from the study of participants' lived experiences could inform the development of policy and practice to enhance the higher educational experiences and improve the outcomes for the Saint Lucian males in the future. The policy makers will be engaged and presented with the findings so as to include them in future discussions on male progression through higher education and provide tangible changes. This would have an impact of economic gains, ca-

reer advancement and improved employment possibilities for young males. Based on the national education goal of improving access to higher education, improving participation from young Saint Lucian males as a priority area will help widen access and so increase higher education participation rates among this cohort.

### **6.1 Research Questions**

During the course of this study, the research question, ‘What factors may facilitate or hinder young Saint Lucian males as they progress through higher education?’ was asked. Based on the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian male students the following findings emerged. In addressing the research question, the factors that facilitated or hindered the progression of those young males were financial barriers, the societal perceptions of higher education, their personal and motivating factors, especially the limited financial support available.

The second research question asked was, ‘How do participants perceive and describe their experience of higher education in Saint Lucia?’ The findings of this research question identified the aspirations and motivations of the Saint Lucian males as they progressed through higher education. As they described their higher education, the young males highlighted the process involved in examining and reflecting on their experiences. They gave specific examples of the issues, which they were confronted with as well their peers. The impact of support strategies such as family, community and peer support was described as significant in the completion of the studies. This impact can be negative as well as positive. The information shared allowed for the objective of the study to be met.

The rapport established with the participants contributed to the ease with which they shared their experiences and opened up about the factors that influenced their educational paths.

## **6.2 Reflections as a practitioner researcher**

In the initial discussion and “brainstorming” of this investigation, I thought of the many dropouts who may have started a higher education course of study but discontinued their studies after a short period of study for a variety of reasons. As I have interacted with several of those individuals, it would be recommended that this group could also provide in-depth knowledge about the situations that caused them to abandon their higher education journeys. They would also be able to identify the factors that would make higher education a viable choice for them. As I reflected on my own development as a researcher, and my practical interaction with young Saint Lucian males, I became aware of the need for further dialogue and more systematic engagements on their higher education experiences. Additionally, the assumptions that may have been widely considered true, such as the lack of interest of young Saint Lucian male students in higher education became an area of reflection. As reflected on their seemingly open manner in speaking with me, I also reflected on the practices that limited their contribution to higher education and that do not explicitly seek their input either formally or informally.

## **6.3 Recommendations for practice and policy**

I hoped that the study would make a contribution to the higher education environment in Saint Lucia with the specific focus on this group of young Saint Lucian males. Additionally, that it would present information that would bring about greater awareness of student voice and positive change in the lives of young Saint Lucian males in their educational journeys. The concerns as expressed by the young Saint Lucian males about their success in accessing higher education emphasised the importance for them to voice their ideas about strategies and policies that would impact the issues sur-

rounding higher education in Saint Lucia. Although, the qualitative research method of phenomenology (Reiners, 2012) was used to give this opportunity during the study and did allow for varied student experiences to be expressed, a desire to continue the conversation was identified by the participants. This underscored the need for them to speak on issues that impact their higher education. This willingness to speak about such issues was significant to note as my perception was such that young Saint Lucian males may be unwilling to share their experiences with me, as they did not know me.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

As I reflected on the study and the engagement of the participants who were students of the Piton Institute of Higher Learning, I would recommend other groupings such as students of other higher education institutions such as those from the medical schools on island, these students could be part of similar research. To better understand the perceptions of young men as they prepare for higher education locally, research could be carried out using the males in secondary schools to determine what their perceptions of, and for higher education are. Many of the participants identified their secondary school years as important in their initial thoughts about higher education. Research, which targets those students, could give further insight into the pathways that students choose and the factors that may determine a choice for or against higher education. The use of mixed methodology can provide both quantitative and qualitative data that would allow for patterns, trends and themes to be identified.

In order to evaluate the perceptions of men in general, I would also recommend that older men who successfully navigated higher education at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning be used as a sample to compare their lived experiences and those of the current and immediate past students. The objective would be to determine the ele-

ments that contributed to their success or failure and compare those to the current challenges or achievements of the students. In so doing a comparison in terms of time periods could highlight how similar or different those experiences were.

As part of the recommendations for future research, the use of a survey would be used in tandem with the interviews. This would allow for more responses and identify the main barriers affecting students in a quantitative manner. This is not to underestimate the significance of the life stories that narrate individual students' experiences, which forms part of phenomenology research. It is however, important to note that different methods can bring in varied perspectives.

#### **6.4.1 Student Voice**

The findings of the study identified the lack of input from the students and their purposeful interaction with them, as it relates to this study with young Saint Lucian males about higher education programmes. Opportunities to share their ideas about ways in which higher education offerings can be made more relevant to suit their needs are limited in their view. The feelings and expressions of the young Saint Lucian males during this study highlighted the need for them to have a voice in the programmes offered in the higher education institutions. This can be achieved through the formation of student councils and other student leadership groups that focus specifically on the needs of this group, so as to offer them a formal platform with which to voice their concerns to other stakeholders. Beyond this study, the publication of the findings will further highlight and put into print the ideas shared by the young males, one of the major ones being the financial barriers that they face when accessing higher education. The impact of female led households does contribute to the financial limitations as expressed by the partici-

pants. This specific family type although, not the focus on the study was noted as contributing issue to some of the financial limitations that participants faced. Greater focus however was placed on the need for financial support initiatives to be more visible and accessible as a response to the needs of male participants. This was in light of the major challenges that were presented as students sought to complete their studies successfully. The visibility of this service could be facilitated through direct participant engagement at orientation sessions and through the student support services. This financial barrier is significant and should be amplified during the dissemination of the findings. With the engagement of various higher education stakeholders and policy makers within the Saint Lucian system, the lived experiences will be further shared with a wider population. Based on opportunities to engage in professional consultation and contribution to the development of higher education programmes, this can have a significant impact on their educational outcomes.

Soliciting objective and anonymous feedback from young male students in the form of a questionnaire or survey at the end of a course would provide information that the institution could use to identify the effective instructional delivery areas where improvements can be made to better serve the students and the goals of the institution. This is based on the research findings that highlight the need for the students to give feedback on their educational journeys, thus taking greater ownership for their studies as supported by Harper (2012) who encouraged formal opportunities to engage with higher education students. Additionally, it would ensure that emerging ideas of new programme offerings could be well positioned and justified in terms of the potential contribution to the broader goals of the Piton Institute of higher learning and that of the nation.

By establishing a student feedback programme through the office of



a Student Advisor or counsellor, this would ensure that the students have a liaison contact and an avenue in which to communicate with the leaders of the institution. The Educators from the various departments and the students could use this service to review and manage new initiatives. This will encourage broader discussion and contribute to a stronger sense of inclusive community. This information can be analysed and used to guide working practices that would assist young males. [SEP]

#### **6.4.2 Relevance and Connection of Programmes**

The review of the various programmes and their relevance to the practical needs of the business sectors and thus the employability of young Saint Lucian was identified as crucial as long-term national strategy. This was clearly articulated by the respondents as an area that needs to be evaluated so as to make a connection between higher education and the requirements of the business sector. That connection would aid in making the higher education course offerings more relevant and systematic based on an assessment of the areas of need.

Such periodic reviews would examine practice and form part of broader strategic planning which focuses on public investment in higher education (Louisy, 2004) thus decreasing disparity of access. The review of the programmes would look at the potential value and viability of the educational programmes alongside key economic stakeholders such the Chamber of Commerce in Saint Lucia, government agencies such as the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Small Business associations and investment groups. This targeted and strategic look at what skills and knowledge are needed in the workforce would be directly linked to the programme offerings, thus giving the students a good chance at getting employment after higher education. Additionally, the students would have a clearer idea

about the programme offerings and their connection to employment. Part of a review of the educational programme is the inclusion of the areas that students experience as being effective, and others where improvements are needed. Based on the study's findings the respondents noted examples of higher education qualifications, which seem not to improve the opportunities for employment and the irrelevance of the content taught to real life work environments.

### **6.4.3 Financial Support Systems**

A clearly identified process for student financial support is also being recommended. Financial difficulties experienced by themselves or others were articulated by all of the respondents. By identifying the criteria and providing the personnel to guide students, they would be better able to access the support that is already available. Set timelines for applications of financial aid will offer marginalised and financially weaker students a vital pathway of monetary support. Such financial initiatives can be instrumental in breaking the barrier of progression and increasing the number of young Saint Lucian males who progress and then complete their higher educational journeys.

A recommendation is made to work with financial institutions such as banks and credit unions to establish an education fund. This could take the structure of a monthly payment, saved at a particular interest rate over several years and directly assigned to the education of a student. Such a programme can be done in collaboration with the Piton Institute of Higher Learning, in that the institution can endorse such a programme. By so doing, another financial option will be made available to young Saint Lucian males and their parents, possibly several years before they need this service. The "burden of finding the money immediately to pay" (SLU 6) for higher education is therefore reduced.

#### **6.4.4 Educational and Social Connections**

The establishment of strategic linkages is another recommendation. Linkages with the feeder educational institutions, such as the secondary schools and other training institutions will allow for young Saint Lucian males to see the importance that these institutions place on higher education. The Piton Institute of Higher Learning would need to engage with the wider community, educators and other higher educational institutions that promote the importance of continuing on the educational journey.

The general perception based on feedback from the respondents is that male students of higher ranked secondary schools are expected to pursue higher education, while those of lower ranked schools do not have the same expectation (Appendix Four). This expectation connects with the prior educational attainment and entry route that is seen as one of the only determinants of higher education opportunities and is significant to the discussion. This perception highlights the need for an establishment of a task force to investigate the reasons why this is so and identify initiatives to help change this so as to include a much broader cross section of young Saint Lucian males in higher education. Engaging the students and educators from the lower ranked schools in this discussion will also give in-depth information and possible solutions to this problem. Outreach programmes in the lower ranked secondary schools will help the students become better aware of the higher education offerings, improve the clarity of programme, explain the entry requirements, give the course overview, and identify the costs.

The use of marketing strategies in the form of public announcements that promote the value of higher education by prominent and respected members of the society can act as a catalyst for young Saint Lucian males to reflect on their higher education choices.

Some of the respondents noted that successful individuals with limited or no higher education qualifications were successful in their businesses. By inviting such individuals to share their experiences in the form of workshops or discussion sessions with the students, either face to face or virtually, would allow them to gain first-hand knowledge about their experiences.

#### **6.4.5 Regional Support**

Forming linkages with other higher education institutions in the Caribbean region and beyond will help The Piton Institute of Higher Learning build capacity, share information and learn from other higher education institutions. I would like to recommend an exchange programme where male students who are successful in their areas of study can have an opportunity to spend one semester in another country. Such an exchange programme would be an incentive for students to maintain their studies and excel. It can also be a factor that creates a higher level of enthusiasm and interest among the young males.

Saint Lucia is part of several regional groupings such as the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Small nation states like Saint Lucia have limited resources to support all of the social and educational programmes that it should deliver to its people. Although these programmes are important in the development of human beings, a strategic effort must be made to impact policy development in such a developing country (Chowdry *et al.*, 2013).

As a member of both of these organisations, Saint Lucia should be able to profit from the experiences, expertise and resources that are present as a collective in the region. All of the Caribbean islands have similar demographics and issues with young males progressing through higher education. Both organisations have education de-

partments, which can help in promoting cooperation among the members and making education of young Saint Lucian males a priority. By pulling resources together, smaller nations like Saint Lucia can benefit from a regionalised approach.

#### **6.4.6 Mentorship Programme**

One of the implications for institutional practice is the establishment of a mentorship programme, where young Saint Lucian males can work alongside other individuals who will act as role models to them. These individuals will provide support in terms of motivating them towards the achievement of their goals. Such a programme would have a formal structure and include student leaders. It can serve the purpose of providing mentorship and developing leadership skills.

Alumni can be powerful stakeholders if used effectively. The Piton Institute of Higher Learning can identify past students who can act as “Ambassadors” in the support of a culture of growth in terms of the pursuit of higher education. The young Saint Lucian males who have benefited from these higher education studies would be able to explain strategies that they used and ways that they were able to negotiate the barriers that they faced.

The Piton Institute of Higher Learning needs to establish a student database that records, tracks and evaluates the young male student statistics. Simply identifying the number of male students who started the programme and did not complete it is not sufficient data. Young Saint Lucian males who do not complete the programme should be asked to identify the reason or reasons why this happened. Such analysis will offer the Piton Institute of Higher Learning valuable information in addressing the concerns and being proactive about the problems that students face with the objective of decreasing their occurrence.

## **6.5 Recommendations for Leadership and Staff**

The findings of the research have very tangible implications for the leadership of the Piton Institute of Higher Learning. The following recommendations for practice are identified so that leaders can reflect upon the practices and structures that can cause positive change in the lives of young Saint Lucian males as they progress through higher education.

Training of staff to work with marginalised and at risk young Saint Lucian males is important. The specialised departments such as the Counselling and students support services can be part of professional development that will look at creating a culture of fairness, empathy and accountability for students. I would like to see a culture where the students know that the educators are there to support them but also hold them accountable for their social actions and educational decisions.

The training of staff including lecturers should include strategies that will assist them in identifying male students who may be having difficulties. Staff members need to be equipped with the procedures that they should follow if they are aware of a student who needs support and the agencies that should be informed of that situation.

The senior leadership and other faculty members need to find time to collectively review the access of young males in higher education in Saint Lucia, at the Piton Institute of Higher Learning Lewis. This review will allow for consideration of their behaviours and actions and ways that they can change so as to support authentic and sustainable change.

The staff and leadership of the Piton Institute of Higher Learning need to identify explicitly how they support and encourage young Saint Lucian males to make the best use of higher education opportunities. If the leadership encourages a culture of alignment of per-

sonal values and that of the organisation values in the importance of higher education, decisions that will value male participation will decrease social conflicts (Posner, 2010). The staff would be able to make decisions about the strategies that they will use to support males in a smooth manner.

Forming partnerships with external social agencies, which explicitly work with young men at risk such as RISE Saint Lucia, which offers a range of services, can offer another level of support to the leadership of The Piton Institute of Higher Learning by creating a culture of public / private collaboration. An on-going partnership can help in the implementation of student support services.

## **6.6 Influence on Personal Practice**

My own professional knowledge and practice as an educator and more so an administrator within the Saint Lucian system has been impacted due to this study. Based on the findings I know that many young Saint Lucian males do want to access higher education, and many have successfully completed studies in a range of disciplines. This is different from my initial thoughts that many males did not value higher education based on my interactions with some students, mainly of lower ranked secondary schools. For the majority of those students, higher education was neither an obvious option nor a natural course after their secondary schooling. For the ones that could be cajoled and encouraged by individuals such as myself, it meant that educators would have to do a lot of the paperwork for the applications and even make financial commitments towards their studies both in the short and long term.

The major issue for me has now become not their lack of aspiration but the awareness of the barriers that prevent them from even considering higher education as a possibility. In my interactions with young Saint Lucian males, I believe that it is my responsibility to

help them see value in higher education and explicitly recognise its importance as a change agent for them as individuals and the country. In the past, I have identified and followed through on specific initiatives geared towards supporting young Saint Lucian males who come from socially and economically deprived households. In my practice I would like to continue and maybe improve upon this in a more systematic way. I understand that a young male may have basic needs that take priority over higher educational attainment. In my capacity as an educator and community worker I know that the efforts that I put into supporting young Saint Lucian males can contribute to a reduction of social ills while helping both the individual and society.

I have had several opportunities to make presentations to and lead sessions with Principals, Curriculum Officers, Education Officers and other Ministry of Education officials on a range of topics that impact education on the island. I will continue to seek such opportunities, with the view of highlighting the findings of this study to individuals who are part of the direct leadership of the Saint Lucian education system and so are change agents. Their leadership in addressing the issues surrounding male participation in higher education and the significant positive impact that can be encouraged in the earlier educational experiences will be explained. This is due to the awareness that these officers have on a community, a district and a nation. The policies that are developed and implemented in the foundational years will also impact higher education. Other opportunities to present to a wider cross section of individuals who can directly impact higher education, on a national and regional level will be sought.

## **6.7 Dissemination of the Research Findings**

The main reason for the dissemination of the research findings is to



influence positive change in the higher education sector in Saint Lucia and in turn the wider community, so that the relevance of widening participation of young Saint Lucian males in higher education can be realised. Therefore, it is important to disseminate the research, firstly to share the findings but also to encourage further research in this area. By disseminating the research, the voice of the respondents will be more clearly heard and the ideas that they have shared incorporated in the discussion about the progression of young Saint Lucian males in higher education.

A copy of the thesis will be sent to the Piton Institute of Higher Learning as part of its research database. This will allow for public access and be another source of literature in that area. Additionally, I would make myself available through the office of the Research Officer to discuss the findings with interested stakeholders and students.

I will initiate discussions with higher education stakeholders and Ministry of Education and Social Transformation officials as well as organisations such as UNESCO and the OECS secretariat for opportunities to present the findings to students, parents, educators and the wider community. This will be done with the objective of increasing the awareness of the lived experiences of young Saint Lucian males and the ideas that they have expressed.

During the years as Education Officer, I was able to establish many contacts and network with both print and broadcast media on the island of Saint Lucia. I was invited to participate in panel discussions, give interviews on educational matters and share as keynote speaker. Based on these experiences, I feel confident that I can engage several media houses about this important issue and use this additional medium to disseminate the findings and conclusions of the study. There are several radio and television programmes that

can be approached to do so effectively and at minimal cost.

As I disseminate these findings, I would like target the young Saint Lucian males and share the findings with them in formal settings such as schools and community areas, but informally as well. The use of a poster, poetry and or calypso competition as a means of highlighting the findings in a manner to capture the attention of the youth could be organised. Since I started working on this study, I have been able to get the commitment of two businesses that are pledging to support one young male each at the higher education level. This financial support in the form of bursary that would be used for school fees and or resources can be used a prize. It would be given out publicly to the winner of a poster, poetry or calypso competition that highlights the importance of young Saint Lucian males pursuing and successfully progressing through higher education. Additionally, I would encourage the public to highlight the winning item such as the poster in their social media posts and status updates on a particular day so as to create greater awareness and reflection of the issues surrounding young Saint Lucian males in higher education on the island of Saint Lucia.

I would like to have the study published in the Caribbean region and used as appropriate by various groups as understanding the barriers that young Saint Lucian males face and how they have internalised progression to higher education will stimulate discussion which can lead to greater awareness and positive change.

## **6.8 Summary**

Higher education within the Saint Lucian environment is part of a post-colonial system that has seen the education system influenced by a former colonial power, Britain. This influence on the education system has impacted every sector and more specifically, higher education. In this study, the experiences of the young Saint Lucian

males were core to the investigation and identified their experiences as they progress through higher education. The social environment of Saint Lucia and the barriers that young males face was explained during the investigation.

The concepts of accessibility and widening participation played a key role as the investigation sought to address the gap in literature within the Saint Lucian higher education context. Although parents themselves may not have had access to higher education, they can cultivate the expectation of higher education in their young Saint Lucian males. For families who believe in the power of higher education as a means to contribute to success and uplift someone, this expectation can be communicated effectively. Although there is limited formal research, many Saint Lucians have, throughout my interaction with them, confirmed the impact of their parents' expectations.

The impact of social, cultural, and academic capital was explored in relation to their role and seen as integral components of this research. The support strategies, higher education values, and the ways in which young Saint Lucian males are motivated to aspire higher education were highlighted.

Within the social structures that define the Saint Lucian setting, the need for young males to share their ideas and contribute to an education system that directly impacts them is important. By so doing they would be part of the discussion on the most effective ways to implement educational programmes and get feedback from the students about the areas that need improvements.

The study brings new knowledge by identifying the specific experiences that the respondents shared about their own experiences and that of other peers. The use of a qualitative, phenomenology research provided oral data, and allowed for the effective collation of

the participants' perspectives and the meaning they attach to the phenomenon under study. The investigation of this phenomenon is important in gaining a further understanding of the lived experiences of the young Saint Lucian males.

From the results found, it is imperative to work towards a more equitable and supportive educational environment. It should seek to eliminate social difference and inequality and offer opportunities to young Saint Lucian males as the barriers to higher education are negotiated and reduced. As young Saint Lucian males express their lived experiences, it is important to note their ideas and use those to contribute to an equitable educational environment.

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## **Appendices**

### Appendix One: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Prospective participant,

I am contacting you because I am conducting a study that might be of interest and relevance to you. The title of the study is 'An investigation into the progression of St. Lucian male students to and through higher education'. I am conducting this study in my role as researcher as part of my thesis for of my doctorate in higher education at the University of Liverpool, UK.

For this study I kindly seek the participation of 15 male students. This project will study the academic, social, economic and cultural factors that influence the higher education attainment of young Saint Lucian males. The aims of the study are to better evaluate circumstances that negatively or positively impact males as they seek to complete courses of study; and to identify support strategies that encourage and enable young men to stay in higher education.

As a male student, I would like to invite you to participate. The study is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. There is no compensation for participation in this study. If you agree to take part, you will be invited to attend a half an hour interview with me.

Interviews will be conducted online for duration of 30 minutes and therefore an audio recording device will be used. Permission will be sought prior to the recording of the interview. At the beginning of the interview you will randomly select a code, which will be assigned to you, but your name will not be attached. This will ensure that confidentiality and privacy is maintained. The researcher will not keep a list of the students' names nor corresponding numerical codes. Based on the objectives of the study there are no apparent risks associated. However, withdrawal from the interview is possible at any time. The study is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time by making that request known, with no consequences. There is no compensation for participation in this study. Nevertheless, the investigation offers an opportunity to contribute to the knowledge about how young males' progress through higher education in St. Lucia.

This can be beneficial information that will help support educational discourse.

I have attached an information sheet and consent form with this email. If you would like to participate, or have further questions please contact me, Fiona Mayer at [Fiona.mayer@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:Fiona.mayer@online.liverpool.ac.uk), or my tutor [susan.bolt@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:susan.bolt@online.liverpool.ac.uk) or my mobile number +1 758 722 0172.

Should you need to contact the Research Participant Advocate do email [liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com](mailto:liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com).

The data collected will be used for the thesis. All of the data used will avoid any information whereby the participants can be identified. The data will be stored in a lockable cupboard and if shared via a password protected computer to my tutors.

I thank you very much in advance for taking the time to consider participating in this investigation.

Kind regards and best wishes,

Fiona Mayer

March 2018



Appendix Two: VPREC Ethical Approval

Dear Fiona Mayer,		
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.		
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:	Expedited	
PI:		
School:	Lifelong Learning	
Title:	An investigation into the progression of St. Lucian male students to and through higher education.	
First Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta	
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Kathleen Kelm	
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Martin Gough, Dr. Rita Kop, Dr. Ruolan Wang, Dr. Greg Hickman, Dr. Marco Ferreira, Dr. José Resi Jorge	
Date of Approval:	20/03/2017	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:		

Conditions			
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.	
<p>This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure.</p> <p>Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).</p>			
Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.			

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix Three: Consent form**Committee on Research Ethics****PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:** “An investigation into the progression of St. Lucian male students to and through higher education’.

**Researcher(s):** Fiona Mayer

I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated February 2018 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider this information, ask related questions and have them answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason or having any adverse effect on my rights. In addition, I am free to decline to answer any question(s) without prejudice.

I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can ask for access to the information I provide that has not been anonymised and request its destruction if necessary.

I am aware that this information will be published in an anonymous format as part of a final report.

I understand that **confidentiality will be maintained and anonymity of data collected will be assured.**

I agree that the anonymised data can be used in future research.

I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

I give permission for the researcher to access my responses.

I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials in any way, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report (s) that result from this re-

search.

I understand that once my data has been anonymised it can no longer be withdrawn.

I agree to take part in the above study):  
 Online interview which will be recorded in audio format by the interviewer

Participant Name		Date
Signature		

Name of Person taking consent		Date
Signature		

		February 18
<del>Fiona Mayer</del>		

Researcher, Principal Investigator		Date
Signature		



**Principal Investigator:**

Name: Fiona Mayer

Work Address:

Work Telephone

Work Email: [Fiona.Mayer@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:Fiona.Mayer@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

## Appendix Four: The ranking of Secondary Schools in Saint Lucia

**TABLE 1**

**2018 MAY/JUNE CSEC EXAMINATION RESULTS**  
**Overall Performance of Schools for the Period 2014 - 2018**  
 Percentage

<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>
Anse Ger Secondary	38.19	41.22	28.39	29.45	30.52
Babonneau Secondary	73.85	70.69	66.59	63.85	56.90
Bocage Secondary	30.33	34.95	35.33	38.31	29.18
Bonne Terre Preparatory High	88.89	84.61	94.75	93.75	96.67
Castries Comprehensive Secondary	87.92	87.20	89.29	90.56	90.29
Choiseul Secondary	66.86	69.48	72.04	66.92	68.55
Cicéron Secondary	67.46	59.80	60.5	68.61	57.49
Clendon Mason Secondary	64.72	44.52	50.69	50.37	44.51
Corinth Secondary	78.59	76.40	68.08	76.21	77.57
Entrepot Secondary	79.89	81.60	80.31	74.82	77.34
Grande Riviere Secondary	68.8	44.62	56.03	56.91	57.98
Gros Islet Secondary	69.33	58.14	43.75	46.39	38.09
Jon Odum Secondary	64.97	49.11	68.42	56.99	62.00
Leon Hess Secondary	92.07	91.73	93.55	90.84	94.80
Micoud Secondary	57.39	53.17	57.41	54.33	55.16
Piaye Secondary	62.15	51.07	54.64	42.62	39.25
Seventh Day Adventist Academy	78.88	71.34	70.81	68.97	79.94
Sir Ira Simmons Secondary	60.5	72.27	67.34	68.80	61.64
Soufriere Comprehensive Secondary	78.55	62.62	62.08	66.31	69.23
St. Joseph's Convent	99.46	98.77	98.71	98.82	99.82
St. Mary's College	94.64	91.90	94.21	93.08	96.67
Vide Boutielle Secondary	54.53	61.31	49.29	45.31	53.02
Vieux Fort Comprehensive Sec.	84.01	78.79	82.14	80.71	81.67

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