



AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SKILLS TRAINING EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM
(STEP) TO DETERMINE ITS IMPACT ON THE REDUCTION OF YOUTH
UNEMPLOYMENT IN ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

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Approval of the Thesis

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SKILLS TRAINING EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (STEP) TO DETERMINE ITS IMPACT ON THE REDUCTION OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

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Doctor of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SKILLS TRAINING EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (STEP) TO DETERMINE ITS IMPACT ON THE REDUCTION OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

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This research paper examined a case of a public policy safety net program within the context of a small developing country of St. Kitts and Nevis. The aim of the research was to assess the impact of the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) on the reduction of youth unemployment within the economy to recommend a model associated with the behavioral public administration approach theory for unemployed youth to transition to permanent employment. Other theories utilized in the study included job-search, labor-market, skills mismatch, and social relationship exclusion. Using mixed methods in an exploratory sequential design, qualitative and quantitative data was collected from a sample of 150 participants across St Kitts and Nevis, which primarily included STEP interns, non-STEP participants and officers involved in youth training and development. The sampling size and technique used was based on the type of study. Thirty-four participants comprised the sample size for the qualitative data and 116 participants completed the questionnaires for the quantitative data. With the use of interviews, focus study groups and online questionnaires, primary qualitative data was first analyzed using Taguette, followed sequentially by quantitative data using SPSS to answer the main research question: To what extent has STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis? The findings were displayed using tables, pie charts and graphs and revealed that this public policy program STEP contributed positively toward a 75% reduction in the level of unemployment that existed in St Kitts and Nevis, prior to its implementation. Notwithstanding, the study also revealed areas of weakness and to a large extent, the program had not fulfilled its intended objective of training and empowering persons with the necessary skills to move from internship to permanent employment. From an assessment of the behavioral public administration theory, public service values such as democratic participation, transparency, accountability, governance ethics, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity were lacking from the findings of STEP, which calls for a demand of policymakers and practitioners within government to employ alternative approaches to policy design and implementation. Recommendations from the study included a re-design and focus, as well as proper orientation, monitoring, and evaluation for the program to advance from a mere “assistance program” to a real “training program”.

Keywords: Youth Unemployment, Behavioural Public Administration, Job-Search, Labour Market, Social Relationship Exclusion, Social Integration, Social Isolation, Skills Mismatch, Allocative Effectiveness and Full Employment

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

AI ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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DEDICATION

A special dedication to God Almighty for making this research work a success. I also dedicate this doctoral work to my immediate family – my wife Andrea and my three daughters Aundriel, Ariel and Arjenel, as well as my father James.

In addition, I dedicate this work to the youths of the Federation of St Christopher (St. Kitts) and Nevis.

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I wish to acknowledge the Almighty God for the strength and fortitude to complete this research study. I also wish to pay tribute to my wife Andrea and my three daughters Aundriel, Ariel and Arjenel and other family members including my father James, for their enduring patience, love and motivation that have helped me to persevere toward the end of this journey.

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ACRONYMS

ABSTEP	Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Programme
AVEC	Advanced Vocational Education Center
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBI	Citizenship by Investment
CC BY	Creative Commons BY License
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CFBC	Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College
CSO	Central Statistical Office
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualification
ECCB	Eastern Caribbean Central Bank
ECCU	Eastern Caribbean Currency Union
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HOPE	Holistic Possibilities for Personal Empowerment
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MSME	Micro Small and Medium Enterprises
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
NYS	National Youth Skills
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECS	Organization of East Caribbean States
OSEC	One Stop Employment Centre
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
SEED	Support for Education Empowerment and Development
SKN	St Kitts and Nevis
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SSNA	Social Safety Net Assessment
STEP	Skills Training Empowerment Program
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UREC	Research Ethics Committee
WB	World Bank

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Like many other areas around the globe, unemployment reflected within the Caribbean countries overwhelmingly comprise the youth population. As it relates to countries within the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS), the youth unemployment rates are greater than the rates for adults, and they have also increased in recent years. For example, Barbados recorded an increase of 57% in youth unemployment from 7.4% in 2007 to 11.6% in 2012, while, prior to the 2008 crisis, St. Lucia's unemployment accounted for a 47% increase rising from 14% in 2007 to 20.6% in 2012. Similarly, unemployment on the island of Jamaica rose from 9.4% in 2007 to 12.7% in 2011 while in Grenada, unemployment was tabled at 29% in 2010 from 25% in 2008 (Parra-Torrado, 2014). As indicated by the World Bank report distributed April 2014, preceding the 2008 global economic downturn, the economy of Saint Lucia endured the most elevated rate of youth unemployment found in the Caribbean as well as the Americas, ascending from 14% in 2007 to 20.6% in 2012 ("World Development Indicators | DataBank", 2019). Resulting from the effect of the financial catastrophe that occurred in the world in 2008, growth in the OECS region decreased enormously somewhere in the period of 2007 and 2013, resulting in a strong adverse effect on the unemployment rate moving from 21 percent to 26 percent, for those between the ages of 15 and 24 (OECS Human Development Report, 2013).

Research conducted by Downes (2006) and Parra-Torrado (2014), has discovered that in the Caribbean, adolescent rates of unemployment are among the most noteworthy. Information retrieved from Caribbean researchers has demonstrated that countries like Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Jamaica fall within this category

of the most noteworthy youth unemployment rates (Parra-Torrado, 2014). In 2019, youth unemployment within the economies of the Eastern Caribbean rose to a frightening two-fold digit figure, as intimated by the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, Timothy Antoine, at the dispatch of the Bank's Strategic Plan in October 2017:

“Across the ECCU, unemployment rates are significantly high (estimated at around 23.0 per cent) with youth unemployment rates elevated at higher levels, estimated to be between 30.0 - 50.0 per cent in some member countries” (ECCB Strategic Plan 2017-2021, 2016. pg 12).

“Exploring new avenues of business within the ECCU would help halt soaring unemployment in the region, which Antoine says has the Bank “very concerned”. In Saint Lucia unemployment reached 21.6 per cent in 2016 and was especially high among young people with youth unemployment at 43.1 per cent. “We are focusing on unemployment, especially in regard to our young people,” Antoine announced at the launch of the plan. “We have an abundant pool of young people. We want a striving and thriving citizenry that have a sense of wellbeing and progress.” (“ECCB Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021”, 2016. pg 12).

Unemployment among the youth can lead to greater difficulties to achieve good income levels, and thus, make possible the better wellbeing of the youth in their adulthood, therefore specific public policies are needed to tackle this issue. As it is difficult to design good public policies, which need to be assessed in their actual results, specific investigation is required to determine if there is a connection or association among youth unemployment and the success of social safety nets and public policy programs.

The intended purpose of such programs is to enhance better economic performance and increase wellbeing for the citizenry, particularly the youth. As such, the capability of the administrative system in each country's context and the political environment both play a significant role in how well public safety net programs can reach the truly vulnerable and disadvantaged. This highlights the significance of considering safety net investments within the scope of policy relating to society, without diminishing the significant role that safety nets can play as transitional aids. There are also several instances of countries that have failed to carry out thorough reforms, and where safety net programs have neither helped needy populations nor resulted in durable attempts to reduce poverty.

One such example is exhibited in the nation of Senegal, a country that disregarded the importance of reform to the structure of its economy for more than ten years. The DIRE initiative, a lending facility designed to assist civil servants who were laid-off as well as unemployed recent graduates during times of change, routed loans free of interest to these groups without taking the viability of the project or need requirements into consideration. Consequently, initiatives had a 32% failure rate, and more than three million dollars were misplaced in the governmental bureaucracy. This was neither a sustainable reform nor an effective method of allocating resources in one of Africa's poorest countries. The DIRE's failure was a result of both poor design and political goals taking precedence over those aimed at reducing poverty.

Additionally, and perhaps most critically, the initiative was not politically or economically viable because it was not a component of the government's commitment to a broader macroeconomic reform effort. Yet, social spending is still biased toward wealthier groups in many other economies. Focusing on the short-term safety net and the social costs of reform, particularly in the absence of macroeconomic reform progress, might draw attention away from the urgent need for changes to the main sectors of society. Given that they are implemented outside of the traditional public institutional structure, many safety net programs avoid facing challenging issues.

Research done by the International Labor Organization (ILO) has demonstrated that seventy million youngsters are ineffectively searching for work (ILO.org, 2020). This speaks to almost 40% of the total unemployed people in the world. In certain nations such as the Caribbean as well as Latin America, the high unemployment rate for grown-ups beyond the age of forty-five is multiplied. As such, governments across the Caribbean continue to face the challenges of youth unemployment and the twin-island Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis is no exception.

To address these challenges, small-island governments across the region have attempted to utilize several safety net programs, some of which are targeted at reducing youth unemployment. For example, the Government of Grenada, following a Social Safety Net Assessment (SSNA) in 2009 recommended and supported by the World Bank, on 11 April 2011, consolidated its three main cash transfer programs into a unified cash transfer program under the new Support for Education, Empowerment and Development (SEED). The idea behind this conditional cash transfer program was to transfer cash to the most vulnerable “on condition” that the beneficiaries will commit to empower themselves and help bring future generations in similar circumstances out of poverty. SEED undertook to do just that by helping the country’s most vulnerable, in areas that promote regular school attendance to advance education, adherence to health and wellness protocols, and human capital development to its citizens.

Similarly, the Antigua and Barbuda Government launched ABSTEP - the Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training Empowerment Programme, with the overall objective to improve employability and expand the possibilities of employment among the most vulnerable, while contributing to the improvement of Antigua’s low-income communities. The Temporary Employment Program (TEP), a component of ABSTEP, was executed over a four-year period (2015 – 2018) and targeted economically disadvantaged citizens aged 17 to 50, consisted of a periodical cash transfer to its recipients in exchange for their involvement in mini-public service projects and a course on life, basic vocational, and fundamental employability skills.

Thirdly, the Government of Saint Lucia introduced HOPE. A significant element of the Social Safety Net Initiative carried out by the Government of Saint Lucia was the Holistic Opportunity for Personal Empowerment (HOPE) programme. HOPE was not welfare-oriented; but attended to the targeted group's immediate needs while providing them with tools to find and develop more sustainable sources of income.

With a variety of ongoing projects, training at different levels, teaching of life skills, and promoting healthy lifestyle habits, HOPE intended to reduce unemployment in the near term and create a cycle of work. Managed by the Social Development Fund of Saint Lucia (SSDF), which combined the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) with the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF); the SSDF's main responsibility was to make sure that essential services were provided to Saint Lucia's underprivileged and marginalized groups.

Similar to the countries afore mentioned, the Federal Government in St Kitts and Nevis launched its Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) on February 16, 2017, offering young unemployed persons an opportunity to learn a skill and obtain a job attachment as part of a program that is grounded in a “people centered governance framework.” The Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP), recently launched, was positioned to guarantee that STEP understudies meet the labor market demands through a series of skills-based training; focused and goal-oriented to give interns a higher quality of certified training in critical areas in the field of work in St. Kitts and Nevis.

According to research done by the ILO, youth unemployment on a global level increased from 11.7% to 13% between 2007 and 2014 (ILO, 2015). Similarly, St Kitts and Nevis recorded a youth unemployment rate of 14.3 in 2007 (Saint Kitts and Nevis, 2023). Additionally, the 2019 pandemic resulted in a worse situation as it relates to unemployment levels. From a global perspective, the pandemic proved more difficult for women and youth. There is a tendency for females to find work more likely in the informal sector of society and as a result, their jobs will be less secured resulting in lesser earnings and savings. They have less access to social protections and comprise most single-parent households; hence their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men (United Nations, 2020).

Further, the effects of the COVID-19 economic crisis with immense increments in joblessness and the likely development of digitalization may bring about a significant separation of youth laborers from the job market for quite a while (ILO, 2020b). Hence the need for the Government of St Kitts and Nevis to implement safety net programs to reduce unemployment among its citizens. As such, investigating the causes to public policy programs that increase employment among youth was critically important.

This research, therefore, sought to examine the STEP program, its effects and impact on youth unemployment in the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis. The objective of the research was to accept or reject the null hypothesis that the implementation of the STEP safety net program by the Government did not result in the reduction of youth unemployment, thereby contributing to the well-being of the economy.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed by this study is a social problem pertaining to the increase of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis. A persistent high level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis negatively affects the labor market and the local economy as this issue contributes to other social ills among the youth within these small developing islands. The Government of St Kitts and Nevis continue to grapple with the challenges of youth unemployment by implementing social safety net programs within a public policy framework to address this prevailing issue.

Whereas there are numerous components ascribed to youth unemployment, among the driving causes is the extended global recession and monetary crisis from which the world is still recuperating. When compared to older and seasoned laborers, young people are more defenseless to financial setbacks in that they hold more transitory or no-contract employments and are more likely to leave jobs in their quest for suitable careers (Lee et al, 2013).

Furthermore, the abilities that young people possess may not be satisfactory for the employments that do exist. An ILO study conducted in 2014 discovered that across 24 nations in Europe, between 25 and 45 per cent of the employed are either over-qualified or under-qualified for their work (*ILO Reveals Substantial Skills Mismatch in Europe*, 2014).

The issue of youth unemployment in an economy such as St Kitts and Nevis can be linked to theories of productivity, job creation, economic growth, skills mismatch, labor market and the behavioral public administration approach as postulated by various scholars. Firstly, Fajonyomi (1996), highlights three basic approaches to his theory of productivity in relation to youth unemployment identified as the status-centered approach, the cost-conscious approach, and the output-centered approach. The first of these approaches is a status-centered strategy, which is defined as the availability of material and human resources to decision-makers. Secondly, it can be seen as the deliberate allocation and prudent use of both human and material resources. This is the method that considers costs. The third strategy, the output-centered perspective, defines productivity as the number of political decisions made along with the number of commodities produced.

The theory of productivity purports that, if a person is healthy, safe, and secure, as well as surrounded by meaningful people, they can be productive and motivated to do as much as they can. As a result, team productivity can only rise when a company's personnel are in good health and feel comfortable. Productivity, according to Etekpe (2012), is the process of producing a surplus of products and services or utilizing the elements of industrial production process to yield a desired result. Similarly, productivity, as defined by Igbokwe-Ibeto (2012) is the comparative measurement of the total output matched against total input, or the dynamics that exists between one unit of labor and its relative output. This output is produced by a specific resource at a specific moment. The output to input ratio is what matters. However, many types of inputs can be used to compare output, including the amount of manual labor, the total of capital invested together with labor inputs, or a combination of both (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012).

As it relates to economics, this concept refers to the effective and efficient operation of traded services and manufactured goods where value and wealth are created.

Secondly, the solution to the theory of job creation has been viewed to be the result of rapid and sustainable economic growth. The improved standard of living and the benefits of job creation, according to World Bank (2013), has been identified as the main benefit of this theory. Job creation largely depends on the information available to potential employers and can be defined as the process by which the number of jobs in an area or organization is increased. Essentially, the procedure of job creation begins with a vacant job position within a firm and an available worker.

Thirdly, the theory in relation to growth in employment and economic growth is made clearer according to Okun's Law, which expresses the thought that when GDP expands by one per cent, the result will be approximately 0.3 per cent decline in unemployment (Okun, 1962). According to the hypothesis, each economy has a steady state of GDP, and any deviation from it is just momentary and will eventually return. When combined, physical and human capital allows for an increase in productivity, and the development of new goods because of technological innovation have long been seen as the main drivers of economic expansion. Increased specialization of labor is also essential for increasing productivity.

Scholars like David Ricardo, Adam Smith and Robert Malthus combined their economic theories to create the classical theory of economic growth throughout their writings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While Smith's theory purported the notion of "laissez-faire" where the government should not impose any form of restriction on freedom of an individual, according to Ricardo's renowned comparative advantage theory, countries can benefit from a trade advantage by concentrating on producing items that have the lowest opportunity costs when compared to those of other countries. Robert Malthus, on the other hand, advanced his theory that the supply of food cannot keep up with the growth of the human population, inevitably resulting in disease, famine, war, and calamity.

From a worldwide perspective, much research has been done concerning the issues surrounding youth unemployment. According to data, the difference between young people and adults, as it relates to rates of unemployment, is greater than in countries with advanced economies, and this has become a global concern. According to a recent World Bank (2021) assessment of country rankings for youth unemployment ages 15 – 24; based on 41 countries the average unemployment rate was 18.67 percent, with Spain ranking the highest value of 36.93 percent and Germany ranking the lowest with 6.95 percent (*see Figure 1*).

For instance, in 1997 the rate of unemployed young women in the Philippines was 18.5% while the rates for men were 14.1% (ILO, 1999a). Teenagers ages 15-19 in Zimbabwe saw unemployment rates of 18.1% in that same year. The rate of 15% for the country's young adult population (20-24) was slightly improved, and both groups' rates were significantly higher than the 4.7% rate for adults (Central Statistical Office, 1998). From a comparison of Latin America, in the same year 1997, Brazil recorded a youth unemployment rate of 16.7%, while the adult unemployment rate was just 6.0%. Similarly, in Chile, the ratios amounted to 19.4% and 6.1%, respectively, in the year following (ILO, 1999b). From these statistics, the evidence of a global issue with youth unemployment is confirmed.

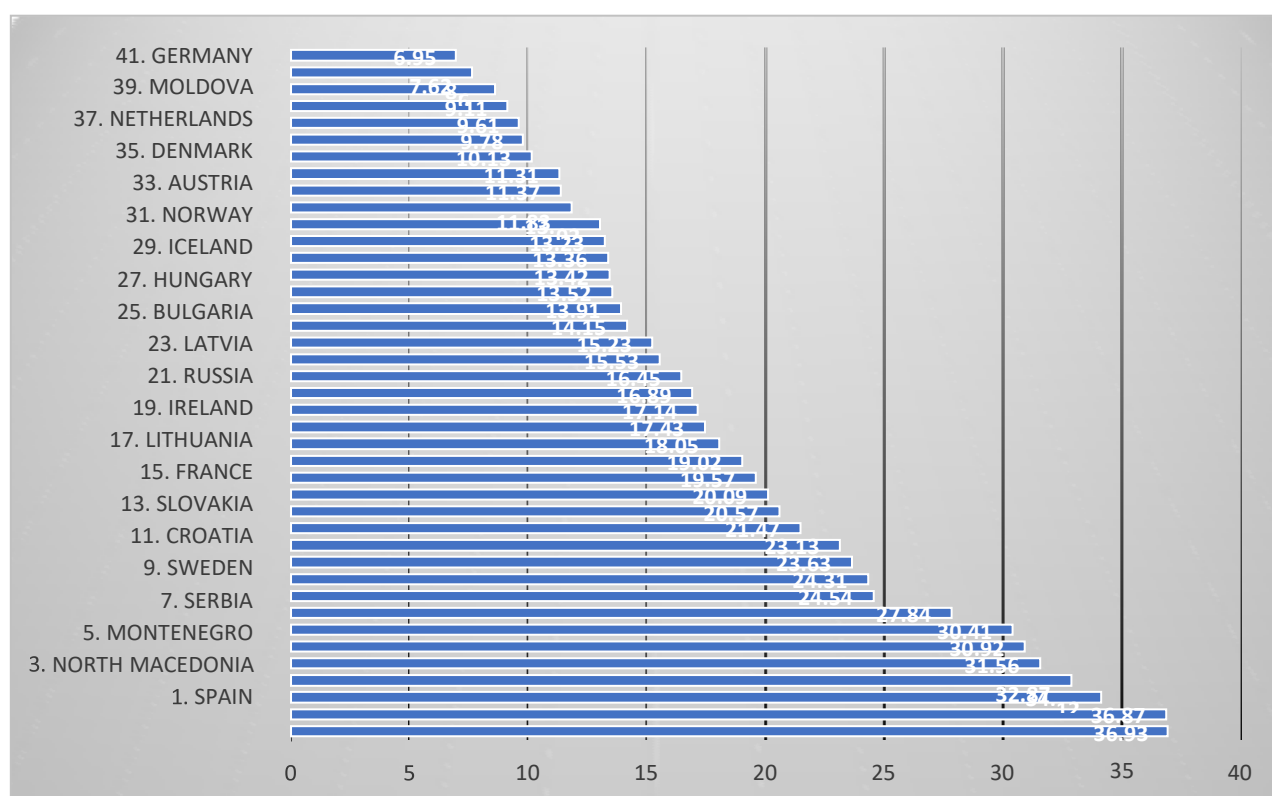


Figure 1: Youth Unemployment, ages 15-24, 2021- Country Rankings

Source: World Bank (2021)

While much has been done on a global scale to research the related issues connected with youth unemployment, within the Caribbean diaspora, and particularly within small island economies like St. Kitts and Nevis, insufficient research has been conducted to discover findings about the hidden causes and commitments to the issue, and sustainable measures that might be adopted to address such. In that regard, this study will seek to find viable and sustainable solutions to this long-standing problem of youth unemployment within small island developing economies.

1.2 Purpose of the Study, Research Aims, and Objectives

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to investigate and examine the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) and the extent of its impact, if any, on the

reduction of youth unemployment within the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis, as a direct result of its implementation by the Government. The Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP), is a National Skills Training Program initiative, designed to support the social and economic transformation of the country by establishing projects that will primarily offer job opportunities to qualified citizens of St. Kitts and Nevis. By offering training to aid in the development of the necessary entrepreneurial and human resource capabilities, STEP aimed to empower program participants and enable their seamless integration into the workforce. The initiative, where appropriate, provided micro-financing for small businesses or offered a weekly stipend to increase household disposable income.

Research conducted within the larger territories of the Caribbean points to high levels of youth unemployment as a negative contributor affecting these economies. As a result of these economic repercussions in relation to the problem with unemployed young people, governments around the Caribbean have tried over the years to address the enduring problem of youth unemployment by introducing social safety net programs. Several countries in the Caribbean like the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Lucia have all implemented safety net programs in one form or another, with various levels of success and sustainability.

The motivation behind this study, therefore, was to survey this safety net program STEP and its impact on the levels of youth unemployment in a small-island economy such as St. Kitts and Nevis. Youth unemployment, to a large degree, has been demonstrated to negatively affect the financial and social conditions of any society. Consequently, this presents the danger of a loss of abilities and capacities as tremendous proportions of school leavers find it difficult to obtain a line of profession and use their insight and advancement toward the commitment of financial development. In addition, the negative effects of youth unemployment can lead to several social issues.

According to research, households are impacted by unemployment, which raises the poverty rate because there is either no income or a loss of revenue. This fosters reliance on social benefits, which has an impact on the economy. As inferred by the World Health Organisation, teenagers without jobs are likely to resort to aggression, support criminal groups, and perform acts of violence, all of which can lead to arrest. The possibility that young people could misuse substances such as drugs and alcohol to get ahead financially or just to get by, increases when they are unemployed (World Health Organisation, 2015). Youth without jobs may be compelled to abandon school or be prevented from continuing their education. A female teenager who is not in school or employed is also more likely to get married young or be a victim of teenage pregnancy.

Toward this end, the primary beneficiaries of the study include, but are not limited to:

1. *The Government of SKN* – as the recommendations put forth from the study will assist policymakers in reducing youth unemployment, resulting in the increase of the labor force and overall improvement of the economy.
2. *STEP interns* -who will emerge with the necessary skill sets and adequate training, resulting in individual empowerment and upward mobility.
3. *Unemployed youth in SKN* -who will have an opportunity to become gainfully employed, thereby contributing to nation building.
4. *Researchers* -who can utilize the findings from this study to build on and expand future research on the subject matter.

The researcher also expects for the discoveries from the study to be of significant worth to other partner organizations on a local level such as the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis; regional institutions like the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank; and global agencies such as the International Labor Organization.

It is also envisaged that this area of research will add to the pool of information on under-investigated areas of youth unemployment within the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis, and the findings of this original study will contribute to the body of empirical literature on active labor market policies and how they operate within small open economies of developing countries. The results emanating from the study will assist the Government of St Kitts and Nevis in the monitoring and evaluation of the program, based on its intended objectives.

Similarly, the data gathered from the study will assist and guide economists and policymakers at the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank in providing economic and financial stability to the country and by extension the sub-region. This research study is in keeping with Goal #4 of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank's Strategic Plan 2017-2021, which is to "actively promote the economic development of our member territories." This is to be accomplished by the continued refinement and implementation of the OECS Growth and Development Strategy (OGDS), which is an economic development plan that outlines sectoral growth strategies to address economic growth and targets among other issues, the enhancement of business competitiveness and reduction of youth unemployment in the region (ECCB Strategic Plan 2017-2021; p32).

Further, the results from the study will not only add to the pool of data for small-island economies like St Kitts and Nevis but will also be accessible to regional and international organizations such as Caribbean Development Bank and the International Labor Organization involved in the continuous efforts of providing support to Caribbean governments in mitigating youth unemployment within our societies.

The aim of this research was to assess the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) to determine its impact on the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis. Assessing the effectiveness of STEP in youth unemployment reduction to the economy of St Kitts and Nevis was accomplished through an examination of the following objectives:

1. To assess the reduction level of youth unemployment because of STEP.
2. To identify the most significant features of the STEP that guide its objectives.
3. To assess to what extent young interns of STEP have increased their chances for employment compared to those who have not participated in the program.
4. To examine the activities of the program to identify which have greater impact and
5. To discover opportunities and suggestions for a better policy design.

Following the identification of the significant features of the STEP training program outlined by its objectives, the researcher compared the beneficiaries of the program with those who were not exposed to the program to determine the program's effect about permanent employment versus unemployment. The researcher also examined and measured the activities offered by the program and the extent of their impact on youth unemployment. Finally, however, this research would be incomplete without the researcher's intent to identify ways and opportunities to enhance the current operations of the program. At the end of the study, it is envisioned that a holistic examination of the STEP program against the backdrop of the youth unemployment issue in St Kitts and Nevis would be accomplished from the perspective of all the stakeholders involved.

1.3 Nature and Significance of the Study

Nature of Study

For this investigation, the researcher utilized exploratory research in a sequential mixed methods design approach that involved both qualitative and quantitative data (Morse, 1991). By approaching a situation from several fundamental emotions using various techniques

and structures, the analyst enables the characteristics' distinguishing validation of it to be much more accurate (Morse, 1991). While a qualitative approach is fixated on understanding a phenomenon from a closer perspective, the quantitative technique featured a greater number of individuals using study methodologies. This blend of information from essential and auxiliary sources provided a more grounded and powerful argument to support a conclusion and suggestions for the issue that was explored. Moreover, a blended methodology brought about a profoundly enlightening and progressively generous research paper. To accomplish a far reaching and all-encompassing perspective on the issue of youth unemployment, the researcher combined logical knowledge with unique impressions to come up with the most precise and ideal answers to the study inquiries.

Exploratory research is carried out to identify a problem's nature. This type of research was intended to aid the researcher in learning more about the issue, which in this case, is youth unemployment, rather than to provide definitive evidence (Saunders et al, 2012). While there are benefits to a single method, the researcher found merit in utilizing a mixed method approach combining qualitative and quantitative data. Thus, the exploratory sequential mixed methods design comprised the first phase of data collection and analysis for qualitative data, followed by a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis, and a third and final phase of data integration from both sets of data. According to Creswell et al, the quantitative segment of the study was succeeded by the qualitative aspect, with the qualitative findings being used as a foundation to contextualize the numerical data (Creswell et al, 2003).

Data collection is a significant part of an exploratory study. With a mixed or blended methodology, researchers can combine strategies for a social issue or look at information from the quantitative and qualitative framework of a single investigative study (Creswell, 2003;

Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In that capacity, researchers gather and investigate numerical data as well as story data to address the exploration question(s). Hence, two of the most fitting instruments identified for this specific examination study were the interview and the questionnaire. The former instrument (interview) was designed and used to gather qualitative data while the latter (questionnaire) was utilized to obtain quantitative data from research participants. Data was obtained from a purposive sample of 150 persons selected from the national registry list from among the fourteen parishes in St. Kitts and Nevis. The survey incorporated interviews, focus group studies and questionnaires with participants from the STEP under investigation. The study utilized on-line self-administered questionnaires as well as telephone, video conference and face to face meetings to gather essential information from respondents among the stakeholder groups identified.

From a qualitative outlook, the personal interviews and focus study group discussions were utilized to find out realities, assessments and presumptions identifying with the basic reasons for this issue and suggestions for remedial action. Using the Taguette software recommended by the UNICAF University, the information was examined to discover various themes and ideas identifying with the research questions, as well as contrasts or likenesses among the equivalent. According to Alexander Di Pofi (2002), qualitative examination is a methodology that investigates or explores human conduct and collaboration concerning a social issue, such as youth unemployment.

From a quantitative viewpoint, data was analyzed utilizing Excel and SPSS, a factual device for evaluating reviews and discovering relations. As a feature of the investigation, examinations were made of elevated levels of youth unemployment over a particular timeframe (approximately 3 - 5 years), prior to and post-STEP implementation. Notwithstanding SPSS, the researcher embraced "Pearson Correlation" to test the connection between the levels of youth unemployment and the components related to this phenomenon.

The results of the investigation were displayed using tables, figures, bar charts and graphs.

Significance of Study

The unemployment rate varies greatly between nations and areas. For example, in approximately ten African and Asian countries, the weighted 27-year average young unemployment rate is less than five percent compared to more than 40% in five African and three European countries. Since 1991, youth unemployment rates have varied between 25 and 35 percent in Northern Africa, 15 to 25 percent in Eastern Europe, 13 to 20 percent in Central and Western Asia, and 10 to 20 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Pacific and South-East Asia, five young people are unemployed for one unemployed adult.

Since the start of the global financial crisis, these rates have significantly risen toward the top range in almost all regions (Fergusson, 2021). At these scales, consistently high unemployment for any age group at any geographical level cannot be seen only as an economic policy issue; for young people, it poses a substantial challenge for social policy. The high likelihood that these problems will manifest as social policy issues that cut across multiple sectors (education, health, housing, and social security) and necessitate "whole society" solutions is influenced by the dependence of many teenagers on their guardians and other adults, the susceptibility of young people to various forms of exploitation, and the risks and danger of prolonged elimination from the job market and economic labor participation.

The significant levels of youth unemployment can be considered a prevailing social and economic issue defying small island developing nations, and greater investigation is required to determine the connection or association between youth unemployment and the success of

social safety nets and public policies to enhance better economic performance and increase well-being for the citizenry, particularly the youth. Government agencies, economists, unemployed youth, organizations and several institutions including the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the World Bank (WB) all stand to benefit from this research.

As a result of a developing concern over youth issues, Caribbean governments have reacted by setting up services and divisions to co-ordinate youth advancement programs and most of them have set up strategies and related projects (Danns et al. 1997). Ordinarily, governments tend to deal with youth issues through instruction, social well-being net projects, work preparation, family administrations, sports and culture. Obviously, the foundation of this issue of youth unemployment must not only be handled by governments, but all partners of youth development. However, governments are largely the lead implementers of social safety net programs within small island developing states in the Caribbean and Latin America, with support and assistance from civil society. Based on a Social Safety Net Situation Analysis conducted by the OECS in 2009, research has confirmed that government departments across the OECS account for 68 percent of the responsibility for implementing these projects, while community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations account for 10 percent and 21 percent of implementation, respectively (OECS, 2009).

This issue related to youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis is concerning and poses a danger to youth improvement and the economy. The high rates of youth unemployment within the region and the implications for young people's financial well-being served as both the inspiration and the importance for this research project. Unemployment, defined as the amount of people in a society who are willing to work for the going wage rate but are unable to do so,

diminishes an economy's capacity for growth and development in the long term. When there are more resources available for production than there are workers, this results in lost output of products and services and waste of economic resources, which directly and significantly impact government spending (Clark, 2003). Once there is less spending on goods and services because of high unemployment, the need for government borrowing will be greater. People and households are severely reducing their expenditure because of unemployment to pay their financial responsibilities.

There is also the danger of skills and talents being lost because numerous college students struggle to find jobs and prefer to apply what they have learned to develop creativity and encourage growth in the economy. A large portion of the young workforce being unemployed also increases economic spending for the nation because more money is needed to be spent on welfare programs with less money coming in from taxes, which in turn affects productivity and GDP (ILO, 2020). Due to the likelihood that unemployed youngsters would turn to other means of surviving, such as crime and violence, a high unemployment rate also poses a threat to St. Kitts and Nevis' national safety and security. Additionally, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened the economic situation with regards to unemployment.

To this end, based on the afore-mentioned problem and negative consequences outlined, this study is important to address the situation in the twin-island economy of St Kitts and Nevis while at the same time acting as a role model for similar small-island economies. This original study contributes to the body of empirical literature on active labor market policies and how they operate within small open economies of developing countries. The investigation highlights a case study of a public policy program (STEP) implemented by the Government to propose and recommend a model associated with the behavioral public administration theory for unemployed youth to gain permanent employment in St Kitts and Nevis.

The researcher expects for the discoveries to be of significant worth to policy makers and other partner organizations within the sub-region and that this area of study will contribute to the field of economics by adding to the information on under-investigated areas of youth unemployment within the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Study Scope

The study scope spans a research period of ten (10) years from 2011 to 2021 with research participants ranging between the ages of 18 to 35. Within this parameter, the researcher was able to assess the economy prior to the implementation of STEP in 2017 and examine the impact of a post-STEP program following its implementation.

1.4 Research Questions

The main research question seeks to guide the researcher in determining what level of contribution regarding youth unemployment that the Skills Training and Empowerment Program has made to the economy of St Kitts and Nevis. The question also addresses the viability and sustainability of this government-initiated safety net program seeking to quantify and measure its success against its intended objectives. The success of STEP is therefore to be measured against the level of youth unemployment within the country from the time of its inception to the time of the research study. In this study, the predictor which is also referred to as the independent variable has been identified as the STEP program while the criterion, known as the dependent variable, has been identified as youth unemployment.

1. To what extent has STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?
2. What are the most significant features of the STEP?
3. To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?
4. What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made because of its activities?
5. What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP program?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses – RQ1

H1o: The implementation of STEP has not resulted in reducing the level of unemployed youth in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: The implementation of STEP has resulted in reducing the level of unemployed youth in St Kitts and Nevis.

Hypotheses – RQ2

H1o: There are no significant features of the STEP.

H1a: There are significant features of the STEP.

Hypotheses – RQ3

H1o: It is difficult for people trained by STEP to obtain employment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: It is easy for STEP trainees to obtain employment in St Kitts and Nevis.

Hypotheses – RQ4

H1o: The activities of STEP have not resulted in any economic impact for St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: The activities of STEP have resulted in an economic impact for St Kitts and Nevis.

Hypotheses – RQ5

H1o: There are no opportunities to improve the current design of the STEP program in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: There are opportunities available to improve the current design of STEP in St Kitts and Nevis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE

Youth unemployment has been a persistent problem in many countries for decades. It is a complex issue that has significant economic, social, and political implications. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation, with many young people losing their jobs or struggling to find work. Therefore, after the pandemic the programmes to increase the employability of the youth rise in importance, but the assessment of the current net system is crucial to improve its effectiveness and actual impact on the youth wellbeing. This chapter provides an overview of youth unemployment and various supporting theories purported by several scholars.

The motivation behind this study was to assess a public policy safety net programs such as the Skills Training and Empowerment Program (STEP) implemented by the Government and its impact on the levels of youth unemployment within the context of the small island economy of St. Kitts and Nevis. Youth unemployment, to a large degree, has been demonstrated to negatively affect the financial and social conditions of a society. Consequently, this presents the danger of a loss of abilities and capacities as tremendous proportions of school leavers find it difficult to obtain a line of profession and use their insight and advancement toward the commitment of financial development.

Youth is undoubtedly considered the most important resource of a country's labor force to boost social and economic development. In addition to their large numbers, young people have the potential to significantly alter a nation's socioeconomic environment if they are well-organized and actively participating in its economic operations. Despite its significance, youthful unemployment is one of the biggest problems that industrialized and developing nations alike face worldwide. In the past, studies conducted on the rate of youth unemployment in different parts of the world have significantly increased our understanding of the scope of this issue.

For instance, a study by Bruno and Cazes (1998) found that the high percentage of youth unemployment in France was a result of the labor market's state being tied to the degree of economic activity. In that study, it was reported that lack of qualification, high labor cost, unfavorable competition among youth and adult, unsustainable training and an unsupportive wage system were all factors that contributed to this phenomenon. Similarly, high levels of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom and Germany were compared in a study, and it was concluded that education, experience and gender were the prevailing factors of contribution (Isengard, 2003).

The study by Woolard and Klasen (2005) also examined South Africa and their issue of youth unemployment and found that the situation made it more difficult for young people to get the resources they needed to start their own families. Likewise, Awogbenle and Iwuamandi (2010) researched the challenges of unemployed young people in Nigeria and discovered that facilitating skills, development and promoting innovations were potential fixes for youth unemployment in that nation.

Other empirical evidence (Dimian 2011) on youth unemployment examined the effects of youth labor market performances in relation to the social and economic development of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries; and Dimitrov (2012) who assessed youth unemployment in Bulgaria. From these findings, Dimian (2011) proved that the gross domestic product of a nation is negatively impacted by youth unemployment while young people's unemployment in Bulgaria was shown to be mostly influenced by such factors as poor education quality, the business cycle and early school-leaving age, according to Dimitrov (2012). Finally, empirical evidence from research conducted in Tanzania (Samji et al., 2009 and Mpanju, 2012) demonstrated that gender, geographic location, education, skills, and marital status are all important factors linked to the status of young people's employment there.

The issues related to youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis are pressing, and a danger to youth improvement and the economy. The inspiration for the research was founded in the elevated levels of youth unemployment seen in the OECS region and the ramifications for

the financial improvement of youth. Against this backdrop, the researcher sought to confirm or refute the null hypothesis in relation to this developing phenomenon; that is, the implementation of STEP as a public policy program has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis. Hence, a review and examination of the literature sought to address the subject of youth unemployment and its related concepts and theories such as productivity, job-search, labor market, skills mismatch, social relationship exclusion and behavioral public administration.

Additional themes relating to the social and economic impact of the economy because of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors were also discussed in the literature. Finally, a brief review of government-implemented public policy programs within similar countries across the region was outlined and the effectiveness of government social safety net programs in addressing youth unemployment was examined.

The scope of the literature review spanned a period of seven to ten years ranging from 2011 to 2021, utilizing a wide selection of journals, research papers and peer-reviewed articles. The researcher primarily utilized Google and Google scholar search engines to accumulate secondary data on the subject area. A number of primary databases were accessed including, but not limited to, Bank of England, BBC News, Dashboard on EU Youth Indicators, Data International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, ECLAC, Eurofound, European Commission, European Union Labor Force Survey, European Youth Forum, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020, International Labor Office, National Bureau of Statistics, OECD, Oireachtas Library and Research Service, PAHO, UNICEF, United Nations News, United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. From the availability of data, the researcher identified and constructed a relevant theoretical and conceptual framework on which to build this study, and this is outlined in the next section.

Keywords and search terms: youth unemployment, productivity, job-search, labor market, social relationship exclusion, social impact, economic impact.

2.1 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Unemployment is often defined as a situation in which individuals who are willing and able to work are unable to find employment. Youth unemployment refers to individuals aged between 15 and 24 who are out of work. The causes of youth unemployment are complex and multifaceted. They include lack of *education* and skills, limited work experience, discrimination, and a mismatch between the skills of job seekers and the demands of the labor market. Social safety net programs are designed to provide financial assistance to individuals and families who need support. These programs can take many forms, including cash transfers, unemployment benefits, food assistance, and housing support. The aim of these programs is to reduce poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

The issue of youth unemployment starts when youth are qualified to work. Research done by the International Labor Office (ILO) has proven that young people have more difficulty finding their first job (ILO, 2011). Funding for initiatives to increase youth employment has quickly increased in recent years. There is, however, scant empirical proof that these interventions boost the skills and knowledge necessary for sustainability and income growth within emerging economies. There is also little to no proof that these youth employment initiatives contribute to peace and stability or provide young people with a more generalized influence. This necessitates a reconsideration of the prevailing theories of change and the assumptions that underlie these current initiatives.

This study seeks to examine the implementation of one such intervention of the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) introduced by the Federal administration of St Kitts and Nevis and its impact on the levels of youth unemployment in that small twin-island economy. From an examination of various theories associated with youth unemployment and the economy the researcher has identified the following to establish a relevant theoretical framework on which to build this study.

2.1.1 *Job-search theory and Labor – market theory*

Within recent times, modern theories have given rise to the continuous research study on youth unemployment and the economy. The job-search theory (McCall, 1970 and Mortensen, 1970) relates to the strategy of job-search for youthful workers with lesser capabilities. This hypothesis, based on two main propositions, firstly addresses early school leavers entering the world of work for the first time and so for the first few years of their working life these young people remain economically dependent on their parents and family members.

Secondly, because of their new entry into the labor force, these youngsters are unfamiliar with the work environment, and because of their young age, inexperience and ability, they find it difficult to adjust. As such, this hypothesis predicts that the increased rate of unemployment among youth directly relates to a high recurrence of joblessness among that populace. The invention of the "matching function" is seen as the most significant progress in the job search hypothesis since its origin, even though many of these theoretical contributions offer fresh perspectives and experiences on the labor search process.

Similar to that hypothesis is the theory related to the labor-market. While the function of the labor market is to facilitate and coordinate individuals with occupations, not all individuals are appropriate for a particular job, and not all jobs are suitable for a given individual. When it comes to the suitability of a person for a job, there are certain characteristics which must be taken as settled - age, sex and capacity - and some which can, at some cost, be changed - particularly the individual's capacities or where he or she lives.

With regards to the suitability of a job for a person, there are certain points of view of the work detail which are difficult to alter, such as the sort of work to be done and the industry in which it is to be carried out. Other perspectives are more easily changed, such as the skill required of the laborer and the area of work involved. In this regard the labor market can be viewed as matching a labor workforce characterized by age, sex and capacity to jobs in relation to their occupation and industry, the matching effected through training and the migration of

industry and labor. A labor market is effective if it fulfils two fundamental criteria: *allocative effectiveness*, which suggests that each laborer ought to be utilized within the occupation to which he is most suited, and *full employment*, which suggests the readiness of each laborer to work at the current wage paid to individuals of comparable capacities.

2.1.2 Social Relationship Exclusion

Another interesting and relevant theory purported by Qun Zeng (2012) is that of unemployment deprivation within the context of social relationship exclusion. In his example, the grounded-theory approach was used, and the study examined how youth unemployment affected their social interactions in a Chinese community and made policy recommendations to address the problem. According to Perri (1997), maintaining regular social interaction is a crucial component of persons intermingling in society, which is in fact, one of the aims of social planning and development.

In addition, he proposed that strong social networks and systems can encourage that "network of opportunity," which may expose additional assets geared toward social development and eventually provide aid to help people escape poverty and unemployment.

Later, Perri (2004) claimed that social policy implementation could lead to social isolation while also influencing people's social systems and advancing social integration. His research backs up the claim that training and internship programs supported by the government can cause trainees to identify as unemployed, which can worsen communication internally and contribute to persons being isolated from society. In this manner, the social approach tool determines how social policy will affect and restrain a person's social systems. Governments can provide unemployed youngsters with training to enhance their employability skills and connect them with employers of companies, who comprise the labor force. This will make it easier to create cohesive social structures in which the unemployed may build their networks and learn more about available jobs, increasing their chances of finding employment sooner (Meijers & Riele, 2004; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1999).

Additionally, the social policy mechanism described in the theory of social relationship exclusion may serve as a broad foundation from where some of its concepts such as *social*

integration and social isolation can be further explored, modified or developed within the context of the St Kitts and Nevis economy to determine the success or failure of STEP as a social safety net mechanism to increase youth employment, boost empowerment and improve the economy.

2.1.3 Behavioral Public Administration

Notwithstanding the variations among theorists and scholars about unemployment and the economy among youth, the *social relationship exclusion theory* in conjunction with *job-search theory* and the *labor-market theory* appear to be the most suited theories for constructing the framework of this study.

Of equal importance is the theoretical approach of *behavioral public administration* purported by scholars like Herbert Simon (1947), who offers insights into methods used to study the attitudes and behaviors of citizens, public managers and professionals. Included in the discussion of behavior in relation to job search is behavioral public administration, a developing theory that could give practitioners new tools for designing and implementing policies. It is the study of behaviors, attitudes and methodology for the purpose of administration and seeks to better comprehend the cycle of causes and consequences after putting laws in place to govern individuals within a specific grouping. This is done by using concepts from behavioral economics that describe individual decision-making with alternatives to traditional utility maximization. From these insights, this approach attempts to improve knowledge and skill of practitioners in public administration and academia. Proponents of this theory include, but are not limited to Max Weber and Frederick Taylor, but it was Simon (1947), who advanced a public administration theory informed by positivism.

With the evaluation of a public policy program such as STEP, the questions to consider by the researcher are how people respond when they receive a benefit from the government and how do these actions relate to the theory of behavioral public administration. The justification for the use of these theories is based not only on the nature of the STEP research investigation, but the similarities of their “matching” concept and the fact that these theories are relevant to

explain, from different perspectives, the social phenomenon of youth unemployment within the context of a particular society. Hinging on the two broad concepts of *allocative effectiveness* and *full employment* described in the labor market theory, the aim of the researcher is therefore to apply the matching traits of the labor force and its characteristics with the real or perceived success of STEP: a Skills, Training and Empowerment ‘safety net’ Program for the youth in St Kitts and Nevis.

Based on the underlying assumption that such public policy programs implemented by governments are geared to the improvement of the economy, the research question surrounding this study is to determine the extent to which STEP has contributed to reduced youth unemployment within the economy of St Kitts and Nevis. As such, the major hypothesis purported in the study is to accept or refute the fact that the implementation of this skills, training and empowerment program has not resulted in such a reduction by carefully examining a critical aspect of the program while considering the ‘skills mismatch’ theory.

2.1.4 *Skills mismatch theory*

This ‘skills mismatch’ theoretical framework of youth unemployment and the economy has been similarly employed in many research studies conducted in Caribbean countries, where the findings suggest that lack of aptitude, inexperience and lack of information are all contributing factors towards the high level of youth unemployment. Downes (2006) demonstrates that the issue is one of a skills mismatch where an individual's information and aptitudes in the work power is in divergence with the prerequisites of the activity, bringing about uncertified laborers. UNECLAC (2005) concurs with this hypothesis of mismatch referring to the fact that laborers do not have the right skills that are required. This addresses a lack in the instructive framework where bosses are tested to select specialists with the essential specialized abilities for the activity.

In the OECS, the absence of aptitudes has been recognized as a requirement to monetary development and worldwide intensity. Models are found in the absence of specialized/designing and administrative territories in St Vincent and the Grenadines and the

significant level of resettlement of talented work experienced in Guyana during the most recent decade (Downes, 2006). According to one academic, there appears to be a surplus of unskilled, low-paying job seekers compared to a shortage of skilled individuals demanding high salaries (Frost, 2002).

2.2 Field/ Industry Description

The field of economics is concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. It is a social science that studies how individuals, businesses, governments and other organizations allocate resources to satisfy their needs and wants. The industry of economics is vast and includes many subfields such as microeconomics, macroeconomics, international economics, labor economics and more. Within the industry field of economics, the subject of youth unemployment has often been reviewed and studied widely. Over the years several scholars have postulated various schools of thought with approaches and methodologies to define the topic of youth unemployment. These range from the early theorists such like Smith (1991) and Blanchard (1998) who proffered the classical theory of unemployment to the famous Keynesian theory - old and new version (Keynes, 1836) and eventually new and modern theorists on the subject matter.

From further afield, the notion of social relationship exclusion was realistically studied within a Chinese context using information gathered from interviews with 19 young people without jobs in Shanghai (Qun Zeng, 2012). Grounded theory was used in the study to examine qualitative information gathered through in-depth one-on-one interviews. The results showed that the impact of unemployment reduced their social contacts, resulting in social networks that are characterized by close relationships with peers yet social isolation, which further leads to less effective social support.

Based on a study of youth unemployment and its socio-economic implications conducted at Bingham University by the Department of Economics in Nigeria (Obumneke, 2012), data revealed that this issue is very dominant in Nigeria with implications for economic stability.

While the study highlighted several main reasons for youth unemployment including the lack of technical and vocational studies; untimely economic policy measures; the abandonment of the sector pertaining to agriculture; and poor planning with regards to education and the right environment, it was deduced that many anti-social activities among the unemployed and jobless youth were the real dangers to the country's stability.

As such, youth unemployment was identified as one of the core causes of the increasing level of social disorder and insecurity permeating the entire country of Nigeria. Youths from a wide range of socioeconomic origins and educational levels have all been impacted by unemployment in Nigeria, but youths from low-income households and those with less education have been disproportionately affected. The afore mentioned makes it clear that unemployment, particularly among graduates, hinders Nigeria's progress in numerous ways. In addition to being a waste of money, it also threatens political stability (Ipaye, 1998).

It has been proposed that the Okun Law explains how greater prosperity within the economy of a country lowers the rate in relation to individuals that are unemployed. Matsumoto et al. (2012) investigated the resulting effect of macroeconomic factors with regards to the occupation of young workers. On the demand side, a study of economic theory showed that the youth unemployment rate fell with rising investment, not only in countries of low and middle-income status, but also in countries with developed industries. Additionally, investment is also influenced by the availability and cost of credit; when banks are reluctant to lend or only lend at high interest rates, businesses have significant challenges in operating and recruiting young workers.

Macroeconomic policies are acknowledged as a key tool for removing restrictions on the private sector, which is anticipated to increase the number of job prospects for young people. Legally binding policies are implemented to promote the foundation of a secure, well-organized, and inclusive workplace.

They provide financial incentives to increase the competitiveness of businesses operating in specific industries with strong employment prospects for young people. In a similar vein, initiatives to increase financial inclusion while adhering to infrastructure-related legal requirements are expected to boost labor demand and create new job opportunities for young people. Fiscal incentives and measures are anticipated to motivate businesses that give young people job experience, leading to a subsequent large increase in youth employment (ILO, 2013).

Additionally, from the perspective of Okun's Law (1962), in Nigeria a further study was conducted to examine the correlation between the growth in the economy and youth who are unemployed. With the use of cointegration tests from new generation panel data analysis, Torruam & Abur (2014) concluded that, to address social challenges, reducing youth unemployment is one of the key goals of governmental programs. They posit that youths ought to be respected as a priority target group for programs concerning the reduction of poverty and unemployment. In any case, it is not possible to realize this need by accelerating economic expansion. As such, there should be a greater emphasis to "increase jobs through small enterprises and poverty alleviation schemes" as well as "the provision of the right skills to youth" (Torruam & Abur, 2014). Due to these financial and social issues, youth unemployment requires critical consideration not only in Nigeria, but also in St. Kitts and Nevis with the implementation of safety net programs like STEP.

Although to a limited extent, within the Caribbean region, similar studies on the issue of youth unemployment have been conducted by researchers like Downes (2006) and Parra-Torrado (2014). Data obtained from the Caribbean has illustrated, that countries such as Saint Lucia, Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica have the foremost critical youth unemployment rates (Parra-Torrado, 2014).

With respect to past investigations led by Downes (2006) and Parra-Torrado (2014), it has been found that the Caribbean has the most noteworthy adolescent rates of unemployment within the region. Further, an investigation done by UNECLAC, surveyed 404,000 individuals,

or what could be compared to 15% of the area's labor force, and found that they were jobless. Of this number, 51% or the equal 203,000 were between the ages of 15 to 25. Inside the Caribbean, youth unemployment rates are altogether high over the national ordinary rate of 40% within the 15-19 age group and 30% within the age group of 20-24 (“Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean 2004-2005,” 2005).

Based on studies undertaken in Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Barbados by Downes (2006) and Parra-Torrado (2014), a sizable portion of job seekers have never held a job before, which makes it more challenging to find employment opportunities. A third of the jobless population in St. Kitts and Nevis have never held a job, compared to approximately one in four in Dominica and Grenada who are completely unemployed. Lack of work experience is the third biggest barrier to filling openings, according to a recent study on labor demand, and 24% of bosses agree that it is the most important problem (Manpower, 2013). In examining the prevailing issues of youth unemployment within the industry field of economics, it is therefore the researcher’s intention to carefully investigate this social phenomenon within the context of St Kitts and Nevis using the theories afore mentioned.

2.3 Youth Unemployment and Productivity

2.3.1 *Early Theorists of Labor Productivity*

The writings of pioneers like Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Frederick W. Taylor, Henri Fayol, Chester I. Barnard, and Henry Ford demonstrate an investigation and understanding of the many proponents of labor productivity and its variations. Work division is typically based on Smith's basic module of labor productivity. He believes that separating the individual work stages of the production flow in an industry leads to increased profitability, which leads to the development and advancement of many professions and enterprises, because separate processing steps lead to expert specialization (Smith, 2009). This division of work idea depends on three distinctive factors: the ability of the individual laborer finishing the assignment; the evasion of time wasted while changing the individual undertakings and the use of machines that interact with individual job stages, reducing working hours and empowering individuals to do tasks that would normally need the involvement of many workers. Smith's elements essentially addressed the advanced methodology of process optimization to include specialization, avoidance of time wasting and the use of technological progress.

With regards to Marx's theory of influence factors, the productivity of work is determined by several factors, including the laborer's normal expertise, the degree of scientific advancement, and mechanical pertinence, the social mix of the manufacturing process, the degree and limit of the methods for creation, and the common conditions (Marx, 1867). According to Marx, other than the classic influencing factors for work efficiency - for example, skill and technical change using machinery - natural existing conditions and societal developments have an impact on and influence job productivity.

Frederick Taylor's approach to management and his scientific management concepts toward the subject of productivity was to ensure the employer's greatest success, as well as each employee. Taylor's labor productivity theory required both parties involved - employees and employers - to be interconnected in a shared connection with one another. His philosophy was based on four key factors: a clear definition of individual work steps and a distinction between executed and managed work; the selection of a suitable workforce and their subsequent training and instruction; worker and management cooperation; and the reasonable distribution and joint responsibility of workers and management (Taylor, 2004).

Henri Fayol's productivity theory, on the other hand, was based on five essential elements of contemporary organizations: perspective and planning, coordination and administration, organization, control, and directives (Fayol, 1969). Fayol's approach was based on the necessity to improve the purely technical portion of the production process with an administrative premise to meet the requirements of that shift, because of technological progress in the modern period and subsequent development (Kosak, 2006). Similarly, as posited by Kieser (2006), given that the unrestricted choice of the individual is constantly the most important aspect of the organization, the presence of a formal organization with defined fundamental criteria is an essential component of Barnard's theory (Barnard, 1968).

Notwithstanding, it was P. J. Verdoorn, a Dutch economist, who proposed a rule that depicted a statistical link, notably in the manufacturing sector, between the growth rate of production and the long-run growth rate of worker productivity. The connection is thought to be technical in origin, implying the existence of static and dynamic economies of scale, hence rising returns. As a result, whereas Verdoorn's stationary law (based on log-levels) merely shows the presence of constant returns to scale, his flexible law (based on growth rates) gives estimates of significant growing returns to scale.

Interestingly, Kaldor (1966) questioned the performance of Verdoorn's law using a cross-section of advanced economies from 1953 to 1964 and discovered that a one percentage point increase in output required only half that amount in employment, with the rest being compensated by an equal rise in productivity. As a result, Kaldor's variant on Verdoorn's law stressed the importance of growing returns to scale as a key driver of productivity growth rate disparities. The outcome of empirical analytical research utilizing time data series from the United States from 1987 to 2007 demonstrated a positive correlation between the two variables in the long term, suggesting that the Verdoorn-Kaldor rule holds true (Castiglione, 2011).

In terms of characterizing and evaluating output in the administrative sciences, Fajonyomi (1996) identified three basic approaches to this theory in relation to unemployment. The first strategy, referred to as the status-centered approach, gauges the availability of decision-makers' material and human resources. The second approach, known as the cost-conscious method, is considered a deliberate allocation and sensible exploitation of material resources and people. The third strategy is known as output-centered, where the measurement of productivity is done in accordance with the number of political decisions made as well as the units produced (Fajonyomi, 1996).

Several academics have also discussed, to varied degrees, the connection between youth unemployment and labor productivity. According to Schack & Groot (1997), European countries had substantial increases in industrial production and historically low unemployment rates in the 1950s and 1960s. By demonstrating that, since 1970, the growth of total employment has coincided with the growth of real GDP in industrialized nations, Maddison (1982) implied that productivity and youth unemployment are adversely correlated. Grill & Zanalda (1995) also noted that between the 1960s and 1980s in developing nations, the rise of total employment remained in a positive connection with real GDP.

Krugman (1994), in contrast, discovered no discernible correlation between productivity and unemployment in several industrialized nations. Some of the nations with the lowest rates of unemployment also had the lowest rates of productivity. For instance, the high unemployment rate between 1981 and 1990 was associated with a period of low production. In comparison to the 1980s, labor profitability was slightly higher between 1990 and 1996, and the rate of unemployment fell consistently until 1995. Due to this, it may be concluded that there was some association between unemployment and productivity between 1991 and 1996, based on the large disparity between youth unemployment and labor productivity. In such cases, the pattern and trend analysis suggest an inverse relationship among the elements of unemployment versus productivity.

2.3.2 The relationship between productivity, unemployment and wage growth

Any country's population can be divided into two groups: those who are actively seeking employment and those who are not. To begin with, people who are prepared and eager to work are referred to as the workforce or laboring population, which includes those who actively participate in producing goods and services as well as those who have no jobs (Njoku & Okezie, 2011). People without jobs or those seeking work are included in the second group. The workforce of a country, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2012), is defined as the population of a country who are prepared and capable, at any time, of making themselves available for profitable employment.

Unemployment happens when there is a gap between the supply and demand of labor. As such, young individuals may then be forced to perform temporary or irregular jobs since there are not enough employment possibilities in the formal sector, which in fact contributes to underemployment (Echebiri, 2005). The overall monetary and social well-being of a country cannot be estimated exclusively by its labor productivity. Estimating social well-being is unpredictable and incorporates employability, conjugal fulfillment, friendliness, local area contribution, and connections to mental prosperity and additional psychological tests.

Individuals who are satisfied with their relationships, socially disengaged, or potentially moderately unemployable may be more likely to appreciate good physical well-being and mental prosperity because of their social well-being, as opposed to those who are dissatisfied with their relationships, socially disengaged, or potentially moderately jobless (Renne, 1974).

The idea that better countries are wealthier countries is based on the idea that health promotes prosperity (Contoyannis and Forster, 1999). With the existence of a reciprocal relationship between economic growth and health, great well-being is seen as a crucial factor of development, and financial development as a stimulant for great well-being (Deaton, 2000). Likewise, according to Ullah et al (2019), increased worker efficiency is a result of improvements in both well-being and education. Nonetheless, for quite some time, there has been a positive relationship between joblessness and a range of physical afflictions, albeit the link between both is not apparent (Norström et al., 2019). Owing to the Covid-19 epidemic, with the projected increases in joblessness throughout the world, there is an apparent risk of a detrimental impact on people's well-being and efficiency, which might lead to even more joblessness; an expected never-ending cycle (Gandy & Mulhearn, 2021).

Except for those resource-rich Caribbean countries, in many of these nations, the productivity in relation to labor has been falling or standing still. The region's patterns in worker productivity reflect how the primary industries are shifting their contributions to growth, with the services sector in countries that rely heavily on tourism and the energy sector in nations that export commodities driving productivity gains. In nations that rely heavily on tourism, the fall in visitor numbers and the decline in the hospitality industry during recessions have had a negative impact on productivity, while the manufacturing sector's efficiency has remained low.

Due to rising demand from developing countries, greater capital investment, and improving global prices, productivity has increased in the countries that export commodities. Sadly, this success has come at the expense of diversification and growth of employment within the non-extractive segment of the economy, where productivity is still an issue. In general, the region's economies have struggled to compete globally due to the pervasive decline in productivity and its sluggish recovery, and it has become particularly challenging to mobilize the labor force and create new jobs.

2.3.3 Impact on Productivity as a result of Coronavirus

Dating back to Jan Tinbergen's (1942) and Robert Solow's (1957) research, the economic theory of productivity and its measurement is constantly evolving (OECD, 2001). Currently, a wide range of points related to productivity are in use (ONS, 2016a). The labor productivity index is one pillar indication for contrasting nations' overall financial success. Nonetheless, the Covid-19 epidemic may highlight some of its flaws, since this indicator concentrates on those who are employed and ignores unemployment, and it is not standardized.

Consequently, the global epidemic is anticipated to result in extensive and lasting repercussions on the world's economy, including a noticeable rise in unemployment, particularly in administrative fields where output is low and low-skilled workers are employed. Some examples of these sectors include commerce, leisure activities, and travel. There is little doubt that the pandemic will have a massive economic impact throughout the world, with long-term consequences for countries and industries (Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, 2020). Furthermore, at the time of writing, the government's ability to mitigate the pandemic's devastating effects was unknown (Bank of England, 2020; BBC News, 2020; Her Majesty's Government, 2020; KPMG, 2020).

All things considered, it is certain that: productivity values in a variety of sectors will change (some on a long-term basis); every nation's profile in terms of its sectorial equilibrium will change; GDP estimates will fall (some incidentally and some more long-term); and unemployment will undoubtedly rise. It is fair to say that the prognosis is bleak in general. The entire impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the global economy and individual nations is still a subject of guesswork at the time of data collection (July 2020), with numerous estimates made with varied degrees of certainty.

For instance, because of the complete or partial lockdown estimates that had been set up, affecting nearly 2.7 billion workers, or four out of five in relation to the world's labor force, it was estimated by the International Labor Organization that the effect of the virus could result in 195 million job losses (United Nations News, 2020). Food and lodging (144 million employees); manufacturing (463 million); retail and wholesale (482 million); and business administrations and organization (157 million) were identified as the four areas most likely to be affected by the virus with regards to decreased productivity. These sectors, all which essentially contain high employment and low productivity, were estimated to experience the harsh effect of the pandemic's influence, accounting for 37.5 percent of global employment.

However, due to the prolonging and escalation of confinement procedures, the International Labor Organization (2020), in a brief amount of time, with the conditions deteriorating for all large national gatherings, accelerated its predicted job misfortunes equaling 305 million people. According to United Nations News (2020), it was noted with special concern that the services and industries in low- and middle-income countries most prone to the pandemic include significant numbers of low-paid workers who are employed informally and have restricted access to safety nets such as health care. However, the major G7 nations were just as hard impacted by the crisis as the rest of the world, with unemployment rates spanning between 1.76 million in Japan to 30 million in the United States of America (Kretchmer, 2020).

2.3.4 Teleworking and Productivity in the face of Coronavirus

The physical distancing measures associated with the Coronavirus pandemic has forced many firms and businesses across the region and the globe, to resort to the vast majority of their employees working outside of the physical office space. Nevertheless, whether they had previously accepted teleworking, this has possibly had significant and varied repercussions and ramifications for enterprises of all kinds (OECD, 2020). Governments should support investments in firms' and employees' physical and managerial capabilities to telework for productivity and welfare gains in relation to more telework to be maximized. They should also address any potential concerns about the welfare of employees and long-term innovation related to excessive workspace downscaling.

Many workers at the bottom of the wage distribution scale who fit the category of young and less educated were impacted during the crisis because they worked in positions that demanded their physical presence, according to an OECD (2020) policy response briefing on gains in productivity in relation to teleworking in the post COVID era (Brussevich, Dabla-Norris, and Khalid, 2020). Additionally, while a survey during the lockdown time undertaken by one of Japan's research institutions indicated decreased self-reported worker productivity, Gorlick (2020) underlined that working alongside your children in inappropriate workspaces will produce a "productivity disaster for firms." (Morikawa, 2020).

Notwithstanding the drawbacks, teleworking can boost company performance by allowing for cost savings. Bloom et al (2015) suggest that by decreasing the amount of equipment and office space, a firm can save money. Additionally, with an increased supply of skills and improvement in the match between jobs and hires, telework broadens the pool of potential employees from whom firms can choose. One example is the employment of highly talented persons confined to a specific location due to personal reasons (Clancy, 2020).

Through improved work-life balance, a shorter commute, and less distractions, telework may also boost employee productivity and company performance. This will lead to more focused work and a decrease in absenteeism. In German workplaces that allowed for work practices based on trust or working time that is self-managed, it was discovered that product innovation intensities were higher (Godart, Görg, and Hanley, 2017), productivity ranked higher (Beckmann, 2016), and worker effort was more intense (Beckmann, Cornelissen, and Kräkel, 2017).

However, it is conceivable that telework reduces worker happiness: for example, owing to loneliness, concealed overtime, a blurring of personal and professional lives, or an unsuitable working environment at home. These variables and more can be studied in further detail to improve productivity among firms in small economies such as Saint Kitts and Nevis in a post-pandemic era. For example, since the onset of the coronavirus in March 2020, for more than a year, the staff of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank telecommuted and the evidence reflected that the Bank recorded a net profit of \$25.2 million for the financial year ended 31 March 2021, as indicated in the recently published ECCB 2020-2021 Annual Report and Statement of Accounts. Notably, the ways in which the welfare and productivity of a worker may be affected by teleworking create an opportunity to maximize its economic benefits by carving out the right policies and procedures.

2.3.5 Factors impacting the labor market's supply side

Given that the global labor market outlook significantly deteriorated in 2022, labor markets currently confront considerable problems. Occurring together since the 1970s, the first case of high inflation and slow growth has been brought on by rising geopolitical tensions, the conflict in Ukraine, an unequal epidemic recovery, and persisting supply chain constraints. To deal with high inflation in a scenario where the job recovery is still not well underway, officials must make the arduous trade-off.

At the end of 2019, when the COVID-19 health crisis originally began, most countries still had not attained their employment and labor-hour levels from that time. Nevertheless, a series of supply shocks, particularly in the food and commodity industries, have increased production costs, driven up inflation of consumer prices and put pressure on the biggest central banks to tighten monetary policy. The cost-of-living issue directly affects household lives and runs the danger of lowering overall consumer demand in the absence of equivalent increases in labor wages. The devastating effects of the pandemic have resulted in massive debt accumulation in several countries. As a result of this, there is a high chance of a worldwide debt crisis, which might jeopardize the shaky economic recovery in many emerging markets.

The goal of supply-side labor market interventions is to give young people the skills they need to enter the workforce, secure positions, or start and grow their own businesses, which will eventually lead to the creation of jobs for others. Typically, these interventions combine education, career advancement, and entrepreneurial promotion. A lot of meta-studies with effect ratings have been conducted recently. According to Kluve et al. (2016), most of the research that achieved concrete outcomes in terms of finishing tasks and boosting profit originated from OECD nations, which do not fairly represent the conditions of low- and middle-income countries. Studies from these nations show little evidence of a successful outcome. Firstly, Blattman and Ralston, (2015) and Fox and Kaul, (2017); purports that there is an absence of proof of sustained impact. Secondly, they argue that these sorts of interventions have been a long way from being cost-effective. Thirdly, there needs to be more investigation into the "demand side" of labor markets and less focus on the issue of what kind of monetary reforms might result in formal employment and paid work for young people (Fox and Kaul, 2017; Flynn, Mader, and Oosterom, 2017).

Moreover, supply related variables are regularly referenced as restricting work in ECCU nations. Due to large settlements and high public sector earnings, reservation wages are thought to be high. If reservation compensations are in fact high and completely unrelated to labor's marginal productivity, this may be the cause of the country's high structural unemployment rate. Additionally, several polls have shown a discrepancy between the supply and demand for labor skills, which some claim may be fueling the jobless rate even further (IMF Working Paper, 2019). A considerable amount of money transfers from family members abroad can improve reservation wages, and in turn, increase the level of unemployment by reducing recipient families' financial demands. In fact, there is a vast body of empirical work that focuses on a decline in the labor supply in many poor countries, including Jamaica, when there are significant remittances (Kim, 2007).

2.3.6 Interventions to energize the labor market's demand-side

Fox and Kaul (2017) contend that the rate of economic and structural development in low-income countries is mirrored in labor markets and the design of job possibilities. To increase wage employment, countries must stimulate interest in the private sector. (Glick, Huang, and Mejia, 2015); however, this is liable to happen at a sluggish speed. Mediations that concentrate on the demand-side of labor markets aim to get rid of constraints on corporate growth, such as wage subsidies; while microfinance initiatives aim to remove barriers to capital availability (Blattman and Ralston, 2015). Government-sponsored cash-for-work schemes are more common in middle-income nations and serve to boost labor demand as well. They should be viewed as 'safety net programs' as opposed to employment programs because they often offer a basic salary to the needy who will labor for modest salaries. Temporary cash-for-work schemes are used in some post-emergency or post-crisis contexts to inject money into the economy (Blattman and Ralston, 2015).

Data on low-income nations are scarce, however Kluve et al. (2016) found that wage sponsorships have a higher success rate in middle-income nations than in high-income ones. A study conducted in South Africa, a country with a sizable traditional region, indicated that young beneficiaries were likely to continue working for up to two years after receiving endowments, even though there were few recipients (Betherman and Khan, 2015). Numerous investigations into payments made to private-sector employers have shown different degrees of effectiveness; some were wholly ineffectual, and people lost their jobs when the sponsorship ended; in other instances, employment was materially delayed (Fox and Kaul, 2017). All things considered, not much research has been done on how these might result in youth-targeted occupations. Job creation for youth is an indirect effect of such interventions given the population socioeconomics of the majority of low-income and middle-income countries.

According to Ulgener (1991), elements of production have an impact on economic growth in terms of quantitative value, effectiveness and efficiency. If productivity grows faster than total input, GDP growth will out pass total input. As a result, productivity is likely to be one of the primary catalysts for economic growth, social progress, and increased expectations for everyday quality of life (Prokopenko, 2001). A rise in labor productivity may result in a temporary drop in labor demand. Increasing productivity, on the other hand, will help open doors for new job possibilities in the long run (Uzay, 2005). Based on studies, the young unemployment rate in OECD countries is around 15%, whereas it is 19.92 percent in the EU - 28. The third element impacting teenage unemployment has been identified as labor productivity. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that unemployment among the young will endure over time. Given the favorable impact of growth on unemployment, policymakers should adopt methods to reduce youth unemployment.

2.4 Job-search Theory

Over the years, several theorists have conducted research and produced findings on this important subject matter. A theoretical framework known as "job search and matching theory" is used by economists to comprehend the mechanisms underpinning the process of workers changing jobs as well as the challenges to effectively matching workers with jobs. According to scholars Burdett and Mortensen (1998), job-search theory is founded on the idea that employed people seek jobs that pay higher salaries than their present employment, whereas jobless workers seek jobs that pay more than their reservation wage.

Based on this hypothesis, the jobless are more likely to obtain similar job offers because they accept lower reservation salaries than employed job seekers. As a result, jobless persons are more likely to obtain work, but they are also more likely to accept lower-quality employment offers. According to recent data, both employed and jobless searchers differ substantially in terms of personal traits, previous employment histories, working hours preferences, and job seeking methods (Longhi and Taylor, 2011).

The focus of job search has been reflected in these two known theories of self-regulation (SR) postulated by (Kanfer et al., 2001) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) by (Van Hooft, 2016). Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) simply describes the steps and elements involved in selecting what thoughts, feelings, words, and actions to make. It is particularly important when considering "excellent" decisions. Self-regulatory activity is influenced by the interaction of these four factors at any given time. Similarly, a psychological theory that connects ideas and behavior is known as the theory of planned behavior (TPB). According to this theory, the motive behind a person's behavior is guided by three fundamental factors: subjective norms, human attitude and perceived behavioral control.

First, according to the self-regulation idea, the job search process is dynamic as opposed to static. While environmental feedback may eventually influence self-efficacy and search effort, job search habits may change (Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995). Second, there is ambiguity in how self-efficacy is conceptualized during the job search, which might explain why different results were obtained. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the causes surrounding various forms of self-efficacy beliefs concurrently during the job search to acquire a greater understanding of the function of self-efficacy in the constantly changing method of job seeking. Third, prior research has only offered a limited knowledge of the border circumstances that influence the growth of job seekers' self-efficacy. Particularly, the creation of efficacy beliefs and how progress, or the lack of it, is interpreted during the job search may be significantly influenced by causal attribution, a crucial component of the self-regulation process (Tolli & Schmidt, 2008).

According to Lopez-Kidwell et al. (2013) and Latack et al. (1995), job seekers use feedback about their progress to change their effort in the direction of reaching their objective. Job seekers regularly review their state of progress to determine whether they are on target or straying from the desired state. This suggests that job search involves dynamic self-regulation. Throughout this process, self-efficacy, which is described as a job seeker's belief in their capacity to carry out activities and achieve goals, is crucial (Kanfer et al., 2001). In particular, self-efficacy may act as a bridge among evaluations of job search activity and changes to later job search behavior. For instance, Wanberg et al. (2010) found a positive correlation between changes in job applicants' perceived job search progress and variations in their employment effectiveness. Moreover, Wanberg et al. (2005) discovered a favorable correlation between the understanding that one can be successful in job search to gain employment and the process of searching intently for a job.

The hypothesis associated with behavior that is planned is a psychological theory that links beliefs to behavior. Icek Ajzen created the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to forecast behavioral patterns in people (Ajzen, 1991). According to the theory, attitudes toward human conduct, personal standards, and perceived control over behavior all have an impact on behavioral intention. The process of seeking a job is a big part of people's work lives. As a result of influencing the pool of alternative positions from which persons looking for jobs may select, job search behavior has an impact on outcomes like employment status and employment quality (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994).

Job search behavior can be described in terms of the specific actions that people take to spend time and effort learning about their options in the work market (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994, p. 278). It entails activities including creating a resume, looking at job advertisements, contacting possible companies, and going to interviews. Studies from the past have examined the variables that affect the process of job search and the results in terms of employment.

An illustration of the Theory of Planned Behavior is reflected in a research study where data were gathered from 697 temporary workers in the Netherlands using a two-wave longitudinal approach. Using the idea of planned behavior, this study examined disparities between minority and majority groups in the factors predicting job search activity (Ajzen, 1985). The findings demonstrated that, rather than their personal attitudes, ethnic minorities' perceptions of societal pressure more strongly predicted their decision to look for a different career. The native Dutch population demonstrated the reverse. Self-efficacy had no effect on how well job search intention was predicted. Job search activities had a big impact on job search results, like finding employment.

In summary, the findings offered some evidence in support of the planned behavior hypothesis in forecasting the behavior in relation to job search concerning a sample of temporary workers in the Netherlands. Job search intention was regarded as a strong precursor to job search attitude, while job search attitude was greatly predicted by subjective norm. The influences of attitude and perceived norm on conduct were completely mitigated by intention. But, in this instance, self-efficacy did not improve the ability to predict intention and behavior.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the search theory method of analyzing unemployment flourished. From the simple understanding that seeking is costly to a labor market hypothesis, a plethora of models have been developed to aid in our understanding of the labor market's other concerns, such as the creation of jobs and the effects of labor market asymmetry, as well as how unemployment responds to different strategies and directives. In the words of scholars Lopez-Kidwell et al (2013), the strongest predictor of usually finding a job is behavior in relation to job search, which is even more essential during moments of economic crisis, according to Georgiou and Nikolaou (2018).

From a report published by the IZA Institute of Labor Economics (Weber & Mahringer, 2006), the testing of the job-search theory was done with the use of two simple models of job creation: a labor demand model with adjustment costs and a search-matching model. The intent was to make clear which variables govern employment generation in each model, to draw attention to the distinctions between the two and further to determine whether supply can create its own demand. The labor demand model is established in discrete time and as such, the economy is divided into many sectors, each of which has several businesses. Sargent (1979), Nickell (1986), Hamermesh (1993) and others offer and explore models of this type. With the traditional search-matching paradigm, businesses of the same kind only employ one person; but in reality, prices vary, and the majority of businesses employ numerous people.

It was found that wage along with prior employment level, have a role in both equations for job creation generated from these two models. The main distinction is that the search-matching model places more emphasis on labor supply, whereas the labor demand model contends that demand plays a significant role in hiring decisions made by businesses. In the search-matching paradigm, unemployment has a direct impact on the creation of jobs. Over time, supply generates demand on its own. A percentage increase in labor supply should eventually result in a percentage rise in employment given consumer preferences and technological advancements. All logical theories of the labor market imply this. Yet, various theories of the labor market provide different justifications for the adjustment that takes place and the causes of medium-term fluctuations in employment. According to the classic Keynesian perspective, the adjustment of wages together with its overall demand play a significant role in determining employment. The search-matching theory, on the other hand, asserts that a rise in supply will result in more jobs even in the absence of wage adjustments.

The creation of new jobs is significantly influenced by wages and demand, as anticipated by wage bargaining and efficiency models. There are no signs that the search-matching strategy enhances our knowledge of how companies create jobs. Instead, it diverts attention away from the crucial role that aggregate demand plays because the search-matching literature typically assumes that the product market is very competitive. A positive association between hiring and unemployment has been shown in numerous research that have estimated "matching functions" (Petrongolo and Pissarides, 2001). Blanchard and Diamond (1989) calculate a matching function and concluded that "... employment is not simply determined by demand". As such, to distinguish between various labor market models, a researcher would need to know if employment adjustment happens because of wage adjustments, changes in monetary and fiscal policy and changes in exchange rates; or as a result of high unemployment inducing businesses to generate more openings.

2.4.1 Job Creation

According to an International Jobs Report produced in January 2015 by the International Monetary Fund on the global unemployment rate; an important milestone in the economic recovery was the return to pre-recession levels following the worldwide jobless rate in 2014. The report offered an analysis of labor market conditions since the end of the 2008-2009 global recession. Notwithstanding the fact that the labor market is a lagging indicator, the recovery to healthy job growth has been extremely delayed in many advanced countries, reflecting sluggish economic growth. Although there is a steady reduction in the unemployment rate beginning in the middle of 2009, it has taken almost six years to make up the lost ground (*see Figure 2*).

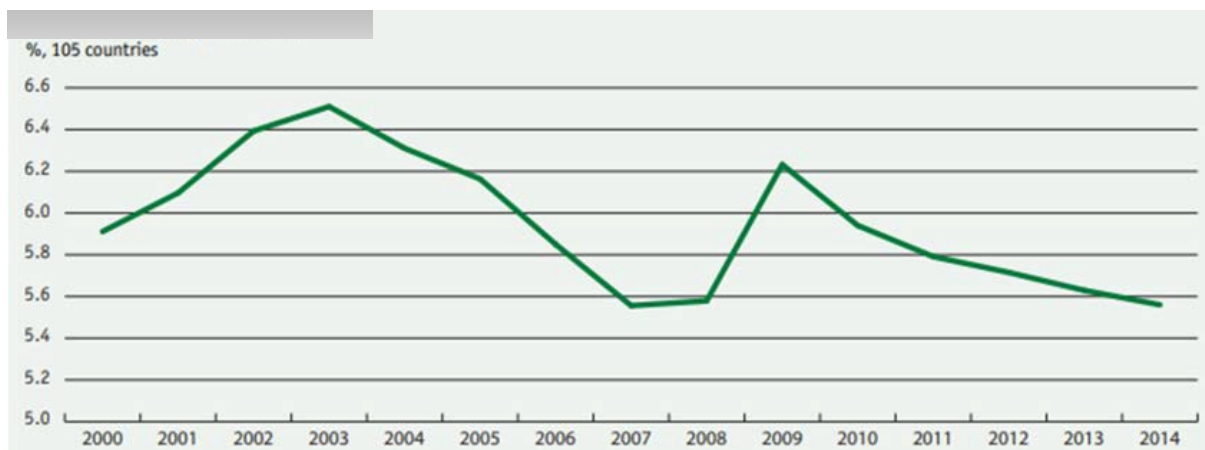


Figure 2: Global Unemployment Rate

Sources: IMF; ILO; Haver Analytics; Economist Intelligence Unit's Country Data; National governments.

In the years after the recession, the advanced and emerging economies took distinctly different courses. Notably, OECD countries suffered by far the largest employment losses, with the jobless rate climbing to 8.4% in 2010 from 5.7% in 2007 (*see Figure 3*). Although the rate fell back to 7.4% in 2014, it is still well above the pre-recession period (IMF, 2015).

Unemployment rates in OECD and Non – OECD economies

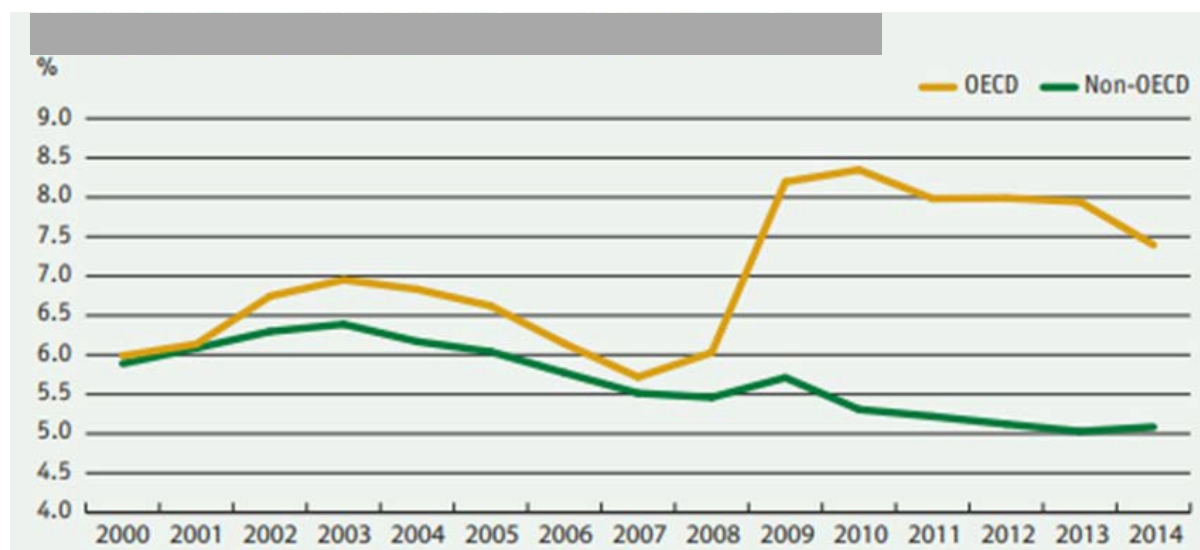


Figure 3: Unemployment Rates in OECD and Non-OECD Economies

Sources: IMF; ILO; EIU

Young people seem to find it difficult to get jobs, especially in the Spanish labor market. According to an OECD analysis from 2018, Spain tops the list of nations with the greatest rates of youth unemployment in 2018, with 34.4 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 (OECD, 2018). Some scholars posit that the strongest indicator of finding a job in general, in this worrying situation, is job search behavior (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005; López-Kidwell et al., 2013). This is even more important when the economy is struggling (Verick, 2012; Vuolo et al., 2013; Georgiou and Nikolaou, 2018).

Job seekers encounter additional barriers, setbacks, and rejection, especially in times of a poor economic climate, which might drain their innovative desires (Van Hooft, 2016). Additionally, the youth of today, referred to as the millennial generation, are seeking employment, not only during a period of economic difficulty, but during a more significant time of transition of attempting to manage interpersonal relationships while trying to accommodate a new lifestyle and financial situation (Smith, 2018).

As a first step to overcoming obstacles, it is crucial to identify the resources that support young people's employment search.

In a study, structural equation modeling was used to examine data for a sample of 568 jobless Spanish youths aged 16 to 29. The purpose of this study was to investigate how psychological capital affects perceived employability in the context of job hunting. Psychological capital is the capacity for hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism that each of us possesses, whereas perceived employability is the belief that one may find a long-term job that is compatible with one's degree of education. The study's findings demonstrated that young people who are unemployed with increased levels of psychological capital also reported having greater control over their search for a job, a factor directly related to their desire for work.

The intriguing findings showed that perceptions of employability are less useful in the context of this inquiry. Theoretically, psychological capital and other global-level motivators may be more significant to the youth than factors like perceived employability. According to Fallows and Steven (2000) and Smith (2019), young people lack the knowledge and experience needed to secure a job, and they are not yet heavily influenced by factors of work like perceived employability. If this is the case, their overall attitude (such as psychological capital) resonates very strongly. Employability has a minimal effect on the re-integration of long-term unemployed people, according to Koen et al. (2013). Of critical concern is the fact that job seekers continue to be enthusiastic and dedicated to the process. This theory suggests that psychological capital, a comprehensive and favorable cognitive evaluation, may be more advantageous for young people looking for work than perceived employability in explaining the success or failure of job searches.

According to the study's findings, psychological capital can be a helpful tool for young people who are looking for work. Even when the economic environment is obviously unfavorable, young people can persevere in their job hunt with the aid of psychological capital. Job seekers with increased levels of psychological capital see their job search process as more in their control, which is strongly related to the amount of time they spend looking for work.

Jobs are mostly produced by the private sector inside government-made enabling frameworks. Government policies should be founded on the rule of law, the establishment and stability of a macroeconomic basis, the development of human capital, the design and execution of acceptable labor rules, and the determination of developmental goals. On a worldwide scale, nine out of every ten job opportunities are created by the private sector. Demographics, urbanization, globalization, technology, and macroeconomic failures, according to the World Bank Report (2013), are some of the reasons that generate work problems. Increased living standards have been highlighted as the primary advantage of employment creation (World Bank, 2013).

The solution to job creation has traditionally been considered as a swift and sustainable economic expansion. Similarly, it was assumed that fast expansion would inevitably result in improved quality of life and social integration. Whatever the case may be, it has been shown that economic progress, rising living standards, and changes in social cohesiveness occur at different speeds. In this sense, economic development does not always imply a reduction in poverty levels. As a result, to achieve inclusive growth, an economic development strategy is required (World Bank, 2013).

Matthew (2012) refers to a tendency of "jobless growth," or economic growth that does not result in the creation of new employment. In such a circumstance, more analytical investigation is required, as well as a dualistic approach to work prospects. According to one academic, there appears to be an excess of unskilled, low-wage job searchers against a shortage of qualified individuals seeking high-wage employment (Frost, 2002).

Torruam and Abur (2014) found from research performed in Nigeria that one of the major aims of public policy is to minimize young unemployment as a solution to societal problems. They proposed that youth be considered a priority target demographic for initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty. However, greater economic development alone will not be enough to achieve this goal. As a result, "increasing jobs through small businesses and poverty alleviation initiatives" and "providing the proper skills to youngsters" should be prioritized (Torruam & Abur, 2014). Due to these economic and social issues, youth unemployment demands immediate attention not just in Nigeria, but also in any other country. From one school of economic thought to the next, based on a hypothetical linkage, an association between growth in the economy and the rate of joblessness can be found. Classical economists believed that the relationship between economic growth and unemployment was a one-way relationship that existed between labor inputs and economic growth.

According to studies, structural barriers and rigidities in the labor markets of the Caribbean impede job growth and exacerbate the negative consequences of market cyclicity. From an International Monetary Fund study conducted in July 2014 with a sample of Caribbean countries, the findings implied that the potential for job creation has been somewhat limited by structural and institutional barriers, which have also hindered the efficacy of domestic initiatives, notwithstanding periods of strong development. As it relates to young unemployment, the current norms and regulations governing labor markets in the Caribbean pose significant obstacles.

This is exacerbated by issues like poor labor market information, low labor productivity, and the mismatch between skills and jobs. To address these deficiencies, a structural reform strategy should aim to bridge the gap between academic accomplishment and demand for skills, increase profitability with the development of skills, strengthen the foundations of the labor market through partnerships and social associations, rethink employment laws, and increase capacity and adaptability inside the world economy. Taking care of these issues will promote job creation and more inclusive growth and development (IMF, 2014).

2.4.2 Matching

Importantly, there are several ideas in the literature on job mismatch, including, but not limited to, the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which states that either the labor demand (firms) or the supply of labor (people) will neither invest in unwanted talents nor high levels of education. Mismatch in the labor market is also treated as a transitory phenomenon in the Matching Theory (Pissarides, 2000), which sees mismatch as an issue that will only be temporal since employees that are mismatched will change occupations eventually to find a better match.

The likelihood of both employed and unemployed job searchers obtaining a job utilizing matching functions, is based on research findings from a wide body of literature. According to Anderson and Burgess (2000), matching functions define and explain the recruiting process and are calculated using aggregate data on unemployment rates, on-the-job searches, and the number of available positions. The findings of these functions frequently show a negative connection between the proportion of persons seeking work found in the labor market and the likelihood of persons without jobs finding work (Burgess, 1993).

Unemployment is commonly viewed by business experts as one facet of an unavoidable job-search cycle. In several ways, laborers differ from occupational groups. For instance, laborers differ with regards to their knowledge, imagination, education, training, experience, physical size and strength, ability to sustain repeated activities, and workplace preferences. Jobs differ in terms of the skills, education, and experience required executing them, as well as the working circumstances, location, advancement possibilities, and a variety of other factors.

Since people and occupations are so diverse, connecting a single jobless worker's characteristics to the best suited empty employment is a time-consuming and difficult task. Instead, jobless workers and businesses with open opportunities engage in a two-way search to find a suitable match as fast as feasible. The length of the job hunt for a typical jobless person is a major factor in determining the unemployment rate. On one side of the market, there must be a pool of employees who are seeking jobs, and on the other, there must be a pool of open jobs.

2.4.3 Skills Mismatch

Skills mismatches can have negative consequences at all levels: individual, company, and macro. From an individual viewpoint, significant skill mismatches may impact pay wages, lower worker satisfaction, and perhaps promote frequent job changes, according to Daly et al. (2000), Dolton and Vignoles (2000), Allen and van der Velden (2001), and Chevalier and Lindley (2009). Failure to locate talented personnel to execute essential duties, on the other hand, has repercussions on the firm's profitability and productivity; its dynamic performance among rivals; as well as its development and even existence (AfDB, 2019).

According to a study conducted in African nations, many businesses are compelled to occupy vacant positions for jobs that need qualified individuals with lower-skilled workers due to skill shortages and gaps, lowering their production and profitability (AfDB, 2019).

Furthermore, a lack of structural skills at the macro level may result in a country's loss of competitiveness with a subsequent increase in unemployment (Boll et al., 2014). Even though 10–12 million African adolescents are employed annually in the job market, research by Fox et al (2013) estimates a mere three million formal employments generated yearly in Africa (AfDB et al., 2012).

Is there a fundamental skills mismatch that is causing unemployment? This topic is worth addressing, according to an analysis of an International Monetary Fund research on the causes driving high unemployment in the Caribbean, because there are arguments for and against it. Evidence of a mismatch in academic achievement between the demand for labor and the supply has been emphasized in the form of anecdotal allegations of a labor shortage for specific skills, which might be a key factor to these nations' high rates of unemployment.

For example, a recent employer study (De Koning and Jong, 2014) found substantial skill shortages in Grenada's labor market, with companies searching for people with unique or more specialized talents and certifications. Likewise, the St. Lucia 2012 National Labor Market Needs Survey revealed that 60% of job searchers had less than a secondary level of education, whereas 75% of job vacancies needed a secondary or higher level of education, according to an IMF (2015) study. On the other hand, tertiary-educated job searchers accounted for just 7% of all job seekers, while accounting for 40% of all employment offers.

However, a closer examination of the facts revealed many limitations to this line of reasoning in an International Monetary Fund (2019) Working Paper explaining high unemployment in Caribbean nations. First, the St. Lucia survey's employer sampling is skewed towards bosses of employees who are low-skilled workers, since all agricultural farm holdings/businesses are exempted with the focus on charitable organizations, formal private sector enterprises and quasi-government businesses.

Furthermore, regardless of the above-mentioned proportionate disparities in the supply and demand of education, the number of vacancies needing higher education in the amount of 357 is significantly smaller in relation to the number of persons (1547) seeking jobs with education at the tertiary level. In a case where all job opportunities needing a higher degree were filled, unemployment would only be reduced by a mere 0.37 percentage points, reducing the likelihood that the educational misalignment is a substantial factor in St. Lucia's high structural unemployment rates (IMF, 2019).

The skills gap has widened because the demand's sectoral change in many economies across the Caribbean was not adequately followed by skills growth. The low-skilled end of the job market is more likely to be unemployed due to a growing gap between demand and supply for people with the right skill sets. The transition in sectors, primarily from agriculture to services, has created a wide range of new professional, technical, and managerial jobs for highly qualified individuals with higher education. On the other hand, due to inadequate training and a drop in the demand for their services, low-skilled individuals are finding it difficult to find employment. In contrast to the demands of the labor markets, there is a scarcity in educational institutions' and training organizations' production despite rising unemployment. Many unskilled employees who were out of work were forced to work in the informal sectors at the risk of later losing their ability to get employment in the formal sectors due to the lack of options for obtaining job-related training.

The skills mismatch issue adversely affects young populations in disproportionate numbers, leading to substantial numbers in unemployed youth in the area. This constant rise in the Caribbean's unemployed youth, currently doubled higher than the average national rate, is highlighting inequalities in the labor market. Hence, the youth population is more likely to become unemployed because of their lack of work experience, but their continually high unemployment rate also highlights underlying problems with the educational system that may prevent them from receiving the training they need to fulfill employer demands.

Most of the countries in the region's lack of direct information on employers' skill requirements is a significant contributing element, which makes changes to educational system curriculum to reflect current skill demand in the labor market extremely slow. Because of the rise in criminal activity in areas with high rates of youth unemployment, youth employment also has social repercussions.

Overall, unemployment search models are helpful tools for understanding the variables that affect the rate of unemployment as well as the effects of labor market techniques and recommendations on unemployment. Furthermore, search theory challenges the conventional wisdom that unemployment is either a waste of resources or the socially useful activity of seeking a profitable job match. Indeed, search models may be used as a means of investigation to determine the impact of various economic factors on the unemployment rate.

2.5 Labor Market Theory

Labor market theories provide an explanation for how wages are set and workers are distributed across various jobs. They provide explanations for why some employees, like skilled workers, earn more money than other employees, like unskilled ones. They also provide a framework for understanding labor market problems including discrimination, poverty, and unemployment and provide remedies that can make these problems less severe. The most widely used method of labor market analysis now is the neoclassical theory of the labor market.

The early neoclassical economics of the late nineteenth century, in particular the work of Alfred Marshall and John Bates Clark, is where this concept finds its beginnings. Economists can study the interactions between organizations or people who want to buy the thing and those who want to sell it using the concept of a market as a theoretical abstraction. Employers eager for hired labor to produce output and workers willing to work for the current wage rate have an exchange relationship in the job market.

One of the important responsibilities of the government, particularly the welfare state, is to ease job creation and ensure better employment conditions each year for the generation of youthful individuals entering the world of work. The importance of this responsibility is highlighted by the fact that presently, on a global scale, the youth labor market requires competent management, however, effective instruments and procedures for the utilization of labor resources are either missing or non-existent in this field (Morozova and Torgashev, 2014).

Additionally, new issues continue to surface and existing employment issues are escalating, with both official and real unemployment rates rising; while a mismatch in the labor market continues to exist between demand and supply and the search of job opportunities for student graduates from university continues to rise (Vinogradova, 2015). Notwithstanding the afore mentioned, other troubling trends that affect the global labor market for teenagers include, but are not limited to, an increase in unemployment as a result of corporate job cuts brought on by information technology; a lack of enthusiasm among young people for careers in the real economy (like farming and production); and the culture of a generation that doesn't want to work or study.

2.5.1 Early Labor Market Theories

Neoclassical employment theories refer to A.C. Pigou's model of perfect labor market competition, which relies on a set of assumptions. Many of the factors that lead to unemployment, such as stagnant wages and an unwillingness to labor at market rates, are discussed in his 1933 book, *Theory of Unemployment*. Both criteria were suggested by Alfred Marshall and backed up by Pigou. The neoclassical concept of labor market equilibrium does not rule out the possibility of unemployment. This phenomenon is defined because of restrictions on the free operation of the pay mechanism, because of employees' behaviors colliding with free market requirements.

As a result, unemployment is regarded as a voluntary event linked to the emergence of a labor market imbalance (Kwiatkowski 2009, p. 11).

According to the classical theory of employment, work demand is regulated by the equality of wage to marginal productivity, and labor supply is determined by the equality of pay utility and marginal disutility of employment. When the labor market is in equilibrium, the marginal product of labor equals the disutility of labor. Unemployment could only be frictional under these assumptions. This point in classical theory provided Keynes with the opportunity to express his fundamental disagreement. Involuntary unemployment, according to Keynes, occurs when an increase in wage causes an increase in both labor supply and labor demand that is greater than the current levels. As a result, unemployment could not be solely frictional for Keynes. The development of the concept of effective demand is another key contribution of Keynesian theory.

In general, it is important to note that Keynes did not share neoclassicists' views on the effectiveness of market mechanisms in the market economy. He also argued that under free market conditions, a propensity evolved to generate a labor supply excess over labor demand, implying the existence of unemployment. He believed that this trend was caused by a lack of demand for commodities. (Wasowicz 2007, p. 44).

2.5.2 Contemporary Labor Market Theories

Overall, three basic groupings of alternative theories can be identified throughout the literature. Those in the first grouping place a strong emphasis on structural and institutional issues as the primary causes of labor market inequity. Segmentation is an example of such theories, in which the issue of labor force mobility constraint is a key component in explaining the processes of creating and maintaining labor market imbalances (Kryńska, 2000).

According to the assumptions and premises that constitute the second group, imbalance can be created by long-term labor market adjustment processes (e.g. due to searching for jobs, changing qualifications, etc.). This category includes theories in relation to job seeking, natural rate of unemployment and human capital. All these ideas emphasize the link between limits on employees' mobility (particularly professional mobility) and labor market inequity. (Kryńska, 2000). The inflexibility of salaries is thought to originate from the labor market disequilibrium in the third group of hypotheses. The efficient work theory and the insider- outsider thesis are two hypotheses that explain it. These theories are aimed at explaining why and how certain firms offer wages that are higher than the minimum wage. One such concept that labor market theory is based on is efficiency of allocation.

2.5.3 Allocative Efficiency

Allocative efficiency is a situation of the economy where output is aligned with customer desires; in that, every good or service is produced until the final unit offers a marginal benefit equal to the cost of production on a marginal scale. The goal of establishing which parts of services are valuable to citizens and the relative relevance of these services is the goal of measuring allocative efficiency. To measure allocative efficiency, consumer preferences must be considered. In examining this concept in healthcare, Gyrð- Hansen (2014) in *Encyclopedia of Health Economics* posits that allocative efficiency, also known as production efficiency, is gained by quantifying benefits in terms of Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs).

Although quality changes are made in part based on user preferences, it has been suggested that this measure of benefit is too narrow in some circumstances since it excludes other utility-generating components of the services, such as process disutility or the value of information. Although such characteristics aren't present in every situation, disregarding them can lead to inefficient resource allocation. Cost-benefit analysis is a useful tool for allocating resources efficiently.

According to the Kaldor–Hicks criterion, a result is more effective if those who are better off may potentially compensate the ones who are less fortunate. When monetary wealth is maximized, this technique, pioneered by Kaldor (1939) and Hicks (1939), judges the efficiency of outcomes. Assuming that people are rational and well-informed about the quality of a product, they will be prepared to pay an amount equal to the marginal utility they expect from purchasing it. When items in society are produced at a level where price equals marginal cost, allocative efficiency is achieved.

When one or more of the following conditions occur, a research study conducted in Western Kenya between 2003 and 2004 found from a sample of 327, that farm households may fail to attain allocative efficiency. Because of various frictions (transaction costs, shirking, moral hazard), paid labor for hire is not a perfect substitute for family labor; market prices differ from effective prices due to transaction costs; households are unable to offer as much labor as they would like due to rationing in the off-farm market; and market knowledge is lacking (Tittonell et al, 2005). In addition to this, there is also the concept of full employment.

2.5.4 Full Employment

Young employees suffer greatly from a deep recession both immediately and over the long term, but they also gain greatly from extremely competitive job markets. Instances when unemployment is incredibly low, commonly known as "full employment," are indicative of labor markets under extreme pressure since at these times, the jobless rate cannot be lowered without inflation being increased (Bivens, 2018). Full employment is required for a stronger economy to benefit all sectors of the labor market, especially historically under-represented populations.

According to research, tight labor markets are especially helpful for lowering unemployment, increasing employment, and accelerating wage growth for low-paid employees and black employees. Katz and Krueger (1999), for example, provide evidence of the importance of a constrained job market in the late 1990s for better overall results. Wilson (2015) provides an example of how these tight labor markets lead to greater growth for African

Americans in terms of income and hours worked. According to Bivens and Zipperer (2018), racial employment discrepancies may be reduced via tighter labor markets. They also discover a correlation between protracted low unemployment and more equitable wage growth, with low- and moderate-income employees benefiting more as unemployment rates decline.

Full employment refers to the most skilled and unskilled workers that can be employed at any one time in each economy. Economists identify many sorts of full employment as policy aims based on their theories. Research demonstrates that, contrary to what Keynes believed, Pigou's theory of unemployment does not assume simply full employment, but also examines circumstances of persistent under-employment that are not always linked to labor market supply issues. Pigou's "classical theory" does, in fact, attribute a considerable role to aggregate demand in the determination of mass unemployment, albeit he was skeptical of demand strategies as a way of obtaining full employment.

If teaching (or a particular profession) is the most appealing activity available based on overall compensation, instructors will enter it and stay in it, according to the supply and demand theory of labor economics (Guarino et al., 2006). In this context, compensation includes more than just money and benefits; it also includes any aspect of the job that influences a person's decision to start, continue, or end it, such as the environment of the workplace, the working hours, or the inherent advantages of teaching. Conditions of service are important because they affect whether choosing to become a teacher is a viable career path and if that choice remains appealing after becoming employed.

With regards to unemployment, one would need to be aware of the distinction between these three kinds of unemployment within the context of labor market theory. A long-standing labor economics tradition is the difference amongst unemployment that is structural, frictional, and cyclical. Structural unemployment is a term used to describe the organizational structure of the economy, which consists of both private and public organizations, market systems, demographic patterns, rules, and regulations.

The literature has linked the importance of these institutional elements for structural unemployment to their impacts on the creation and consumption of labor, the setting of prices and wages, and the effectiveness of search and match as a labor market activity.

Frictional unemployment is a kind of structural unemployment that mostly represents temporary unemployed periods as a factor of job search and matching difficulties linked to quits, new labor market entry, and employment separation owing to employers' dissatisfaction with specific workers. Cyclical unemployment, on the other hand, differs from unemployment that is structural and frictional in that it is primarily driven by short-term economic fluctuations.

Scientific evidence for the relevance of structural unemployment versus cyclical unemployment can be found in the fact that variations in legally recorded unemployment rates have been much larger between cycles than within cycles, likely reflecting structural unemployment disparities (Layard et al. 1991). For instance, during the business cycle, the average unemployment rate in Western Europe rose from about 3% in the middle of the 1960s to 6% in the middle of the 1970s, and then to 10% from the middle of the 1980s to the late 1990s.

Both structural and cyclical unemployment are generally seen in economic theory as occurrences of disequilibrium because they represent an over-abundance of labor supply at the going rate and indicate that the labor market has not cleared. However, the idea of equilibrium unemployment is frequently used to evaluate structural unemployment from a technological standpoint. This suggests that the general unemployment rate is in a "state of rest" and that the surplus labor supply will persist so long as specific features or parameters of the economy stay the same. If this equilibrium is dynamically stable, the unemployment rate that the economy would eventually experience, assuming no more disturbances materialize, is also known as the unemployment equilibrium. The term "equilibrium" has a wide range of interpretations in economics. It can be used to describe a condition that often lasts throughout time, the equality of supply and demand in a market, or classic "market-clearing." An illustration of the latter is the idea of "equilibrium unemployment."

One of the main characteristics of the modern youth labor market is its high unemployed rate, which is characterized by a lack of jobs for young people, unequal representation of women in the workforce, social and professional insecurity among young people, a mismatch between demand and supply in the job marketplace and more. From a student unemployment survey, an excess of 250 students of the Management Department, Economics Faculty of the International RUDN University (2017), indicated a number of concerns and patterns of behavior: a sizable portion of those who did not intend to perform the occupation for which they were equipped; the significance of informal interactions in young people's job searches; and an absence of employment experience as a common justification for employers to decline to hire university students and graduates.

Some of the main survey questions related to the need to work in their field of expertise, expected earnings while looking for employment, the primary job search methods, the causes for the challenges of locating a suitable job, the fundamental standards to consider when selecting a job, the explanations for young people's dissatisfaction in the labor market and looking for new employment. The findings of the survey revealed the following as the primary causes of the elevated level of youth unemployment; in that one in six students were reluctant to pursue employment in their field of study (in this case, "management"). The lowest rate of pay for which students were willing to work was USD 500; the absence of employment experience was the primary barrier to obtaining an appropriate job; informal conversations were the primary means of searching for a job; and four main causes (high wages, career opportunities, company stability, and employer receptivity) were the key attributes in relation to job hunting.

2.5.5 Labor Markets in the ECCU and OECD countries

Even though the global financial meltdown and natural disasters have occasionally hurt employment in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU), the fact that unemployment rates in most of these countries have remained stubbornly high for decades suggests that there are long-term factors preventing the labor market from clearing at low unemployment levels.

As a result, stiff structural traits are presumably common. Rigid job markets are a frequent and important contributor to unemployment in many nations. According to OECD (2006) and Orlandi (2012), labor market rigidities, particularly the widespread unionization in several of these countries, account for a sizeable amount of structural unemployment in OECD countries (two-thirds, to be exact).

Additionally, considering that research indicates they have historically been connected to high unemployment rates in this region, the relatively high unit labor costs in ECCU countries are particularly worrisome. The average pay in social security data is divided by GDP per capita to determine the link between unit labor costs and unemployment rates. This is done when the unemployment rate appears to be unaffected by cyclical variables, indicating that it is more likely to reflect structural unemployment.

From an IMF (2019) study attempting to explain high unemployment, unit labor costs were calculated for the early 2000s, prior to the Cricket World Cup-induced construction boom, and during the second half of 2010, several years after the global economic downturn. The findings revealed a positive and substantial relationship between approximated unit labor costs and unemployment in both times. Unit labor costs in nations with double-digit unemployment rates, such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia, have remained significantly higher than in nations with lower unemployment rates, such as St Kitts-Nevis and Antigua and Barbuda.

Drawing on data based on research that was done across a selection of Caribbean nations to examine the factors that influence job creation, structural and institutional challenges continue to be the root of labor market problems in the Caribbean region. (Kandil et al., 2014). Downes (2006) outlines many features of the job market specific to the Caribbean. High rates of unemployed people, particularly among young women; an overall upward trajectory in real earnings that outpaces productivity growth; a lack of labor union participation in wage negotiations and labor protection throughout the economy; stringent regulations; a slow rate of labor force growth due to high departure rates and an "ageing" population; a rise in female labor

engagement and a reduction in participation of the male gender; and a general upward pattern in real wages.

Based on a labor market analysis done by Kandil et al (2014) for specific Caribbean countries, the following issues were revealed. Throughout the year 2000, the unemployment rate in the Bahamas fell, while real growth gradually picked up. After that, the following ten years saw a significant slowdown in growth, which was accompanied by an increase in the unemployment rate. Secondary school graduates (63 percent) and university graduates (25.5 percent) made up most of the workforce. In contrast to an overall unemployment rate of 7.9% in the same year, the composition of the workforce in 2007 showed a significantly higher proportion of youth unemployment, estimated at 18.9%. Notably, two years later, in 2009, the jobless rate rose to 14.2 percent. Productivity growth showed a long-term downward trend as well as sharp declines in 1998, 2003, and 2009—years that also happened to be marked by economic recession and rising unemployment.

For the majority of the previous two decades, up to 2009, unemployment in Barbados decreased. Early 1990s double digits were followed by low single digits in 2007. In the late 1990s, strong growth performance assisted in lowering the jobless rate. Output contraction in the early 2000s caused the unemployment rate to rise, but this was swiftly undone by an uptick in development and a decrease in the rate of unemployment that persisted for the better part of the first ten years. However, the economy in Barbados saw a severe contraction in 2009 because of deteriorating global conditions, which also caused the unemployment rate to rise significantly. After that, the unemployment rate started to increase, peaking at 11.2 percent in 2011.

The cyclical nature of unemployment among young people, which is far higher than that of the overall population, is consistent with these patterns. Even though Belize's growth rate was rapid, the unemployment rate had fluctuated throughout time. In the late 1990s, poor growth and high unemployment were co-existing issues. In the early part of the preceding ten years, as growth momentum accelerated, the unemployment rate considerably declined.

However, the unemployment rate was increasing more recently, and 2012 saw an unprecedented percentage of 16.1 percent. Since most job applicants have only a primary education or less, the labor force was heavily concentrated in categories with lower educational attainment. This represented about 75% of the entire labor force.

The unemployment rate in Guyana had changed over time with the growth cycle but had remained consistently high. The rate of unemployment fell from a peak of 16.8% in 1980 to a low of 11.7 percent in 1992, thanks to robust growth rates in the early 1990s. However, the unemployment rate remained above 10 percent, rising to 10.7 percent in 2006, the most recent observation, despite erratic development towards the latter part of the 1990s and the early 2000s. Notably, the predicted rate of youth unemployment in 2002 was substantially greater at 24 percent.

Jamaica indicated that over the past 20 years, unemployment has consistently been in double digits, albeit initially trending downward. Despite remarkable growth rates in the early 1990s, the jobless rate remained consistently high. The unemployment rate was, however, pushed downward by a pick-up in growth momentum in the early 2000s until the economy suffered from a persistent, severe decline in the latter half of the previous decade, which caused the jobless rate to rise. Despite some recent indications of a revival in GDP, the jobless rate was 13.9 percent in 2012. With cyclicity that mostly reflected what was seen at the aggregate level, compared to overall unemployment, high levels of youth unemployment have more than doubled.

Over time, the rate of unemployment in Suriname varied with the boom cycle. Low growth rates throughout the 1990s were accompanied by high unemployment. Nevertheless, the growth momentum increased in the first half of the previous decade, which significantly decreased the rate of unemployment. This rate then grew after the growth rate decreased, but the trend was later reversible when growth picked up at the end of the previous decade, bringing it to a record-low low.

The trend in Trinidad and Tobago's unemployment rate's decline did not seem to follow the boom cycle. However, a strong declining trend represented a structural change that happened in tandem with more abundant energy sources for most of the past ten years. The structural change was supported by a deliberate government plan to minimize unemployment through social initiatives, independent of the business cycle. In the latter years of the previous decade, the policy succeeded in lowering the jobless rate to a historically low level.

St. Lucia's growth was very cyclical. However, due to structural rigidity, unemployment was kept to a minimum while the economy had shifted away from banana cultivation. In other periods, although with a lag, employment fluctuated cyclically along with changes in real growth. Early 2000s saw high unemployment due to negative growth, which was greatly reduced in the middle of the decade by rebounding recovery. The unemployment rate notably rose more recently, reflecting slower growth in the late 2000s.

In summary, the primary cause for the high unemployment rate was the spike in youth unemployment, which accounted for the largest shares with 54 percent among those aged 15 to 19 and 34 percent among those aged 20 to 24. Forty three percent of workers within the workforce have no or only an elementary education, with 33.5 percent of workers having a secondary degree as the next highest educational level, and only 11 percent of workers with a tertiary education. Despite growth being cyclical, unemployment has been increasing, suggesting that there has been little job creation throughout recent economic booms. In nations with a wealth of natural resources, public employment—which does not seem to closely track measures for productivity and the economic cycle —seems to have been the only area of job growth.

Consequently, the population of several Caribbean economies has suffered severely because of the failure to mobilize growth. Real growth has experienced cyclical fluctuations in unemployment over time, leading to significant job losses during recessions and sparse job growth, especially during booms in the economy's high-value-added areas. Owing to this, there has been a modest increase in per capita income, rising youth and women's unemployment

rates, greater vulnerability of substantial portions of the population to external shocks, and increased poverty.

The Caribbean countries' high levels of debt and external shocks have limited development possibilities while raising unemployment. Except for the countries that export commodities, growth within the Caribbean region has been at a standstill for the past 20 years. Notably, the region's most recent spurts of high growth were caused by variables unrelated to home-based policy and/or structural advancement. Instead, growth varied in reaction to changes in foreign aid, tourism revenue, banana production, and commodities prices. Additionally, the job component of expansion has been limited during economic booms, revealing deep structural challenges that have gradually contributed to high unemployment rates (Kandil et al., 2014).

Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018) contend that automation and the risks associated with it are higher with regards to young people living in OECD countries, given that they are more likely to work in core professions, which are more at risk from automation. According to Muro, Maxim, and Whiton (2019), younger workers (those aged 16 to 24) make up 29% of those employed in the food preparation and service industry in the United States, but only 9% of the total workforce. Additionally, nearly half the youth population (48%) work in the six highly automatable occupational groupings, compared to 34% of adult workers. Similar to this, Atkinson (2018) contends that youth workers are more at a disadvantage of losing their jobs than the older ones and asserts that lower-skilled professions would be more affected by the next wave of technological advancements. Children who are over-represented in low-wage and informal jobs will suffer even more if this prediction comes true.

There is strong evidence from studies of previous recessions that those who enter the workforce during a recession are permanently damaged. Comparing these unhappy workers to those who entered the job market at more favorable times, they stand a greater chance of generating lesser incomes, higher earnings insecurity, and lengthier long-term bouts of unemployment. There is a lot of study concerning the consequences (short and long-term) of

economic downturns on young employees that span several years and nations, despite typically focused on graduates from colleges and universities.

Kahn (2010), for instance, looks at the results of labor market outcomes for male college graduates of white ethnicity and finds that completing college during a recession has long-term negative consequences on their employment prospects and income. People commonly continue in low-paying, low-quality occupations because of their bad start. These workers might struggle to compete with their peers from before the recession, even while the economy is recovering.

According to Rothstein (2020), the Great Recession's detrimental effects on graduates of higher education who started their careers in 2010 stayed for a long time instead of disappearing. Furthermore, according to Rothstein, the current recession may leave enduring scars on 2020 grads. By gender, race, and level of education, Schwandt and von Wachter (2018) analyze outcomes for all labor market participants (not just graduates from colleges). The authors conclude that "the effects of entering the labor market during a recession are particularly large for two groups: nonwhites and high school dropouts."

2.6 Social Relationship Exclusion Theory

2.6.1 Social Relationship Exclusion

Social exclusion theory is a concept that describes the process of being shut out from social relationships and institutions. It is a multidimensional concept that includes social, economic, and political dimensions. Social exclusion theory suggests that social relationships are important for economic success. Qun Zeng (2012) proposes the notion of jobless deprivation in the context of social relationship exclusion. In his example, Zeng (2012) applies the grounded-theory method to examine how social relationships among unemployed young people in a Chinese community are affected by unemployment, as well as policy suggestions to solve the issue. Adequate social interaction comprises a critical aspect of a person's socialization, which is also an important policy goal. Emotional and financial support can be achieved from good social networks, while creating a "network of opportunity" that leads to the discovery of more social resources, helping people to overcome poverty and unemployment

(Perri, 1997). In recent social policy research, enhancing the function of social networks has emerged as a major new trend (Phillipson, Allan, & Morgan, 2004; Rodger, 2000).

According to Perri (2004), government policy can influence people's social networks and encourage social integration, whereas social policy execution can lead to isolation within a society. These case studies back up his claim that state-funded training and internship programs may help to establish a person's identity, promote internal communication and foster social division. As a result, social policy's impact and effect on a person's social networks is determined by the social policy mechanism. The government can provide training to unemployed youngsters to increase their working capacities while also connecting them with business owners. This will help in the development of interconnected social platforms where the jobless may increase their social resources and learn more about potential job opportunities, in order that they may find a job soon (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1999; Meijers & Riele, 2004).

Since the 1990s, a new concept known as "social exclusion" has gained traction in business. Gallie and Paugam (2000), defined 'social exclusion' as the effects of unemployment on a person's social connections, employment activities, and financial condition. Individuals, families, communities, and neighborhoods are deprived of the resources needed to engage in society's social, economic, and political activities, according to Pierson (2002). Although poverty and poor income are the main contributors to this phenomena, other elements including discrimination, illiteracy, and unfavorable living conditions also have an impact.

As a result of this process, individuals spend a large portion of their time and lives disconnected from the institutions and services, social networks, and opportunities for development that are taken advantage of by most of society. According to Levitas et al. (2007), social isolation is a multifaceted and intricate process. It also involves the incapacity to take part in the typical activities and interactions of the masses in society, whether in the sphere of culture, society, politics or the economy. It influences people's quality of life as well as the equality and cohesiveness of society.

Two important studies on teenagers who are unemployed where social exclusion was used to examine how unemployment affects young people's social relationships are *Youth Unemployment and Social Exclusion: Dimensions, Subjective Experiences and Institutional Responses in Six Countries of the European Union* (Kieselbach et al., 2001) and *Youth Unemployment and Social Exclusion in Europe: A Comparative Study* (Hammer, 2003). From a review of these studies, three effects on social interactions were discovered. The first is the effect caused because of unemployment on social contact frequency.

According to a study conducted in the 1930s by Bakke (1969), an individual's social contacts substantially decrease after leaving his or her work. However, a more recent investigation revealed that there is no substantial difference with regards to the frequency of social interactions between working and unemployed individuals (Gallie, 1999). The impacts of unemployment on the structure of social interactions are the second factor to consider. They spend much of their time at home and socializing with other unemployed individuals, particularly women (Gallie, 1999; Morris, 1992; Nordenmark, 1999; Russell, 1999). Social isolation or social segregation are terms used to describe this. The effect of unemployment on social ties should be considered as the third component. Social separation or isolation prevents many unemployed persons from receiving enough social help (Gallie, 1999; Russell, 1999; Wilson, 1987).

Overall, exclusion within a social context refers to people's inability to fully engage in social, cultural, political and economic life, as well as the mechanisms that contribute to and sustain that position. Notably, the social, political, and economic exploitation that disadvantaged people experience is referred to as components of social exclusion. This deprivation might be seen as an imposed incapacity to exercise basic rights of individuals such as the right to be educated, the right to be employed and earn a reasonable wage, the right to good health and well-being, and the right to vote and run for office (UNDP, 2007). As such, the factors associated with exclusion from society depict the intersection of social and economic processes, all of which eventually leads to marginalization (Estivill, 2003).

Poor educational attainment, personal characteristics-based discrimination, financial poverty, joblessness, no housing or illegal immigration, living in isolated geographic locations, and criminality among juveniles are all commonly listed as important drivers of youth social exclusion. Poverty and other social problems can emerge because of social exclusion, or vice versa. Social exclusion, on the other hand, is an interpersonal rather than a redistributive term, which distinguishes it from poverty. “Exclusion is not about gradations of inequality, but about mechanisms that act to separate groups of individuals from the social mainstream,” as Giddens (1998) put it.

2.6.2 Social Inclusion

From the perspective of a young person, social inclusion is the process by which an individual comes to realize their potential within a society and is accepted and acknowledged by social institutions (through volunteer work, employment, study, or other forms of participation). The notion is applicable to all young people in modern European societies since youth is the time in a person's life when they transition from being dependent on their families to being autonomous members of a broader society in rapidly evolving circumstances. This concept holds a special relevance for young people who originate from poorly financially structured families and live in vulnerable situations. For them, achieving social inclusion entails overcoming several obstacles before obtaining their social rights as contributing members of society.

The approach has been the subject of in-depth research that was funded by national and European bodies and considered the difficulties associated with conceptualizing and evaluating social inclusion. As such, about forty indicators on young people's living conditions, modes of participation in public life, and barriers to social inclusion have been developed by Eurostat through routine studies like the Labor Force Survey (LFS), Survey on Income and Living Conditions, and its Flash Youth Barometers.

Numerous barriers that prevent young Europeans from successfully integrating into society are amply supported by the EU Youth Indicators Dashboard. Owing to the fact that the

increased unemployment rate within the Union affected nearly 25% of young persons in 2012 between the ages of 18 to 24, the demise of great expectations for integration within the labor market following the financial meltdown in 2008 was perhaps the most outstanding youth issue with regards to emancipation.

With the unemployed number in Germany reduced to less than one in ten young people and more than one in two young people unemployed in Greece, there are significant differences between the countries. For example, early school leavers, comprising 12.7% of young Europeans are another group that has a difficult time integrating into society. Rates lower than 5% in Slovenia and Croatia are in sharp contrast to almost 25% in Spain, while at the same time less than 1% of the youth in Norway, Sweden and Luxembourg live in severe material deprivation contrasted with up to 45% of youth in Bulgaria.

Approximately 14 million Europeans between the ages of 15 and 29 are classified as "not in work, education, or training" (NEET), making them vulnerable to social marginalization. From 5.5 percent in the Netherlands to 23% in Italy, it has a scale. Territorial inequalities within countries result in incredibly poor regions where the disadvantages are concentrated resulting in the prevention of the young people accessing their rights. This is reflected in areas such as the North-East region of Romania and the South-East region of Bulgaria, where Eurostat indicators reveal more than fifty per cent of the population who experience poverty or social exclusion.

2.6.3 Social Integration

In France in the 1970s, the phrase "social exclusion" was coined to characterize people who were not covered by social insurance and were at risk of being permanently cut off from society. During the 1980s, when the rates of unemployment were high and national models of social integration were under danger, the term gained popularity in Europe (Kronauer, 1998). Moreover, 2010 was designated by the European Union as the European Year of Poverty and Social Exclusion. As a result, social exclusion is viewed as a dynamic process involving deprivation on several levels that affects a person's capacity to engage in mainstream society.

Disadvantages in the fundamental aspects of life, in relation to education, employment, income, housing and well-being, make it challenging to uphold an "appropriate" standard of living and social engagement are referred to as exclusion from society (Andre, 2003). But in addition to a person's subjectively poor financial situation, social inclusion is also determined by their sense of social inclusion.

Social integration is defined by a set of arbitrary guidelines and requirements, and different people place different values on them. A person must be able to structure his or her life in accordance with subjective perceptions and objectives to feel like a part of society and participate in social activities. Because of this, social integration requires both a person's ability for action and their actual behaviors (Sen, 1985). A variety of factors including mental health status, position in society, close social surroundings and general life satisfaction can all influence a person's subjective sense of social integration (Popp and Schels, 2008). However, character traits like self-efficacy can also be important, which can help a person cope with deprivation on multiple levels.

The subjective evaluation of one's living circumstances and social standing, in addition to objective elements like financial means and social ties, is a critical component of social exclusion. The perception of being unnecessary or unimportant in a group may have an impact on one's subjective sensation of social isolation (Popp and Schels, 2008). For one to feel a part of society, integration into the work market is essential. Sociologists have discovered that when it comes to employment versus unemployment, the former is associated with a higher level of perceived social integration than the latter (Gundert and Hohendanner, 2014; Layte et al., 2010).

2.6.4 Social Isolation

On an individual level, the absence of social interactions, contacts, and ties with family, friends and neighbors; along with "society at large" on a broader level can all be characterized

as social isolation. Social isolation, from an economic standpoint, puts people in a situation where they are unlikely to find a job again. The findings of a study done in Germany could shed new light on the efficacy of active labor market policy measures in minimizing this risk. While the effects of programs sponsored by government on the likelihood of re-employment vary, temporary employment, such as initiatives for job creation or pay concessions, may aid in the reintegration of the jobless back to society (Bergemann and van den Berg, 2008; Card et al., 2018). In this vein, the government in Germany recently introduced the program "Soziale Teilhabe am Arbeitsmarkt" on a federal level to improve long-term jobless people's social inclusion (IAQ et al., 2018).

It is critical, from a policy standpoint, to devise employment strategies that mitigate the psychosocial costs associated with unemployment. Programs that improve people's perceptions of their social standing and self-efficacy may help them avoid feelings of rejection from society and, as a result, avoid a negative spiral that leads to long-term unemployment.

2.6.5 Social Policy Mechanisms

UK governments have made tackling socioeconomic isolation a priority. Social scientists are still debating whether the concept has any analytical value or is just a politically feasible way to acknowledge extensive poverty and unemployment (Byrne, 1999; Hills et al., 2002; Roberts, 1997). Recent governments, on the other hand, have considered social exclusion as a concrete truth, one of the more difficult issues to resolve. In recent inclusionary strategies in the UK (Centre for Leisure and Sport Research, 2002; Coalter et al., 2000), sport and cultural projects have been used, but the New Deal Welfare to Work Programme for 18–25-year-olds and the new Connexions Service have been the main recent policy initiatives to prevent unemployed young people remaining apart or drifting further apart. Youth characterised as NEET (not in employment, education, or training) are thought to be the most common among those reared in low-income households.

The employment position of young people, which has been severely impacted owing to the financial dilemma that started in 2008, is a serious concern for the European Union. The crisis has seriously impacted young people in a negative way. It has widened the gap between those who have more opportunities and those who have fewer. Youngsters are growing increasingly disconnected from civic and social life, placing them at danger of being disengaged, marginalized, or even radicalized. Based on audit reports published between 2013 and 2017, many young people are unable to obtain suitable employment, which obstructs their route to independence. Even though youth unemployment has decreased in most Member States since its peak in 2013, it remains a severe worry. For example, in 2016, 4.2 million young Europeans were unemployed, with a large proportion facing unemployment on a long-term basis.

The degree to which young people participate in social and political activities is significantly influenced by poverty. According to the findings of interviews conducted as part of a recent study on youth involvement by the European Commission (European Commission, 2013b), young people's political participation requires social and economic integration. Stakeholders that engage with excluded youth point out that fundamental necessities like shelter, clothes, food, and employment must be supplied before fostering their participation in debate and building democracy. The European Commission's Social Investment Package aims to reduce the risks of exclusion faced by many young people by addressing childhood disadvantage, improving access to high-quality education and support services, helping young people develop skills relevant to the labor market, and ensuring work experience and on-the-job training (European Commission, 2013a).

The main objectives of the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) are to improve and equalize young people's prospects in school and the job market, as well as to encourage integration into

society and cooperation among all young people. Social inclusion is one of the eight key areas of action defined by the strategy, which was prioritized during its second three-year work cycle (2013-2015). Governments across the globe are urged to develop and carry out country-specific policies in this area, such as increasing and mobilizing youth work opportunities and youth centers as social inclusion tools; addressing homelessness by providing shelter for the homeless; fostering intercultural competence; and battling discrimination.

Approximately one in three young people in the European Union that fall between the age range of 18 through 24 is at danger with regards to poverty or social exclusion. People are deemed poor if their income is less than 60% of the typical family income in their place of origin, according to an EU-agreed definition. Being one of the major factors contributing to social exclusion, poverty has a significant impact on the quality of life for excluded young people. Young people may not have the financial means to afford decent housing, financial stability, quality education and training, adequate medical care, recreational and cultural pursuits, and counseling guidance from professionals in the event of emotional difficulties due to poverty, unreliable employment with little stability in the job market, and low income.

As such, the well-being of young people is significantly threatened by unemployment. Lack of a job can put a young person's self-esteem and social confidence in jeopardy, which can lead to psychological anguish. It also typically indicates that young people won't have the financial means to look after their own health needs. Young people who have left school and out of work for an extended length of time are socially and politically ostracized, which worsens their emotions of dependence, helplessness, and dissatisfaction. Not having a job, as well as a lack of education and training, is associated with risky behaviors, which can lead to ill health and social marginalization. (Eurofound 2012, p. 60).

When one examines the scope of social isolation as a concept, looking at the role of specific economic events particularly connected to the rise of an excluded population is beneficial. The crucial occurrence of long-term unemployment is an excellent example. Indeed, the remarkable incidence of unemployment in contemporary Europe is likely the sole fundamental contributor to the continuance of large-scale social exclusion. With double-digit unemployment rates in several European countries (between 10% and 12% of the workforce in France, Germany, and Italy, and even higher in Spain), the foundation of a great many Europeans' self-reliant and self-confident economic existence has been severely damaged. This is in sharp contrast to the recent experiences of other nations, like Japan and the United States of America (both of which have far lower unemployment), as well as Europe's own recent accomplishments of exceptionally low unemployment (with unemployment rates between 1 and 3 percent).

Significant economic, social, and political ramifications result from youth unemployment. Economically speaking, it results in loss of productivity and human capital, which may have a long-term impact on economic growth. Youth unemployment increases the likelihood of poverty and social marginalization, which can be harmful to both the physical and mental health of these young people. Youth unemployment can cause feelings of pessimism and dissatisfaction in society, which can fuel social unrest and political instability. According to research, youth unemployment has a detrimental effect on the larger community. For instance, it may result in higher crime rates and lower social cohesion. Additionally, it may put a strain on social welfare institutions and raise public awareness of the issue.

2.7 Social Impact of Youth Unemployment

Every young person should view finding a job that provides adequate pay as a crucial step toward the transition to maturity and acquiring financial independence and self-reliance. Even though these jobs sometimes have subpar or oppressive conditions of employment and are unorganized, they are frequently the only way for children and young adults living in poverty and other challenging situations to better their circumstances in life. Prospective employment affects the educational and career paths that more privileged youngsters take, as well as their decisions on marriage, kinship, and cohabitation. By promoting social integration, intergenerational communication, citizenship, and solidarity, youth work benefits society.

Young people can benefit directly from the creation and fulfillment of income-generating job possibilities to reduce poverty. Thus, youth employment promotes advancement in society. To preserve or improve an economy's productivity and competitiveness in the global market, it also makes it easier for young, skilled workers to enter the productive areas of the economy. However, rising and persistent youth unemployment is damaging to the growth of society.

Some young individuals may be more likely to use drugs, get sick, and get into trouble if they are unemployed, especially if they are unemployed for an extended period. In addition, frustration and low self-esteem may result. The marginalization and exclusion of young people can also be caused by youth unemployment. There is evidence that youth who are unemployed are more likely to experience lower future salaries, longer jobless spells as adults, and income poverty. The costs of youth unemployment to society's economy can be significant. The requirement to meet the needs of young people who have been out of work for a while can place a major burden on state finances. Whenever there is a disconnect between the education and training that young people get and the needs of companies, or if there are simply no job prospects available, both young people and society suffer the costs.

One of the most pressing challenges confronting economies today is unemployment, and it is a barrier to any economy's growth and development. Seasonal unemployment, disguised unemployment, rural unemployment, urban unemployment, industrial unemployment, and educational unemployment are all examples of different forms of unemployment. Unemployment has social consequences that result in a bad quality of life and a state of constant misery. The greater the disparity in income and wealth distribution would match with the higher the level of unemployment. It also creates a vicious loop in society by generating issues such as illiteracy, poverty, and other issues. As a result of the social implications of unemployment, it is a societal threat because it hinders social fairness and exacerbates social unhappiness by widening the income disparity.

In general, unemployment, and more specifically youth unemployment, has been a serious concern in many industrialized societies over the past 30 years (Isengard, 2003). The move from education to employment is a difficult and tumultuous time. In comparison to adults, youth are typically more prone to be jobless, and their first employment is generally insecure and temporal (Jacob, 2008). In their transition to work from school, most youth experience brief periods of unemployment; nevertheless, some become mired in unemployment and end up facing unemployment for a considerable lengthy period (Kelly et al., 2012).

Unemployment among young people creates societal difficulties such as a lack of orientation and anti-immigrant sentiment, resulting in increased social expenses. On a societal level, excessive young unemployment jeopardizes the operation of systems managed by social security, which rely on an appropriate quantity of mandatory contributions from employees to function effectively (Isengard, 2003).

Unemployment has a broad range of social and personal consequences, including extreme financial poverty and deprivation, debt, housing instability and stress, family conflicts and disintegration, boredom, marginalization, stigmatization, increased social isolation, crime, loss of confidence and identity, deterioration of professional skills, and negative health. Most of these issues rise in tandem with the length of unemployment (Dixon, 1992; Economic Planning Advisory, 1992; 2023; Cass, 1988). In today's Australia, unemployment is the leading cause of poverty. According to King (1998), when the Housing Poverty Line was created in 1996, over 70% of jobless persons in Australia were poor. Unemployed individuals are known to quickly face hardship and deterioration in their level of living, nutrition, clothes, and health care, according to the Victorian Social Justice Consultative Council (1992).

People with a lack of knowledge and skills are more likely to be jobless or earn poor pay (The World Bank, 1993), and research by Williams and colleagues (2013) suggests that young people whose parents have attained a low level of education, and low-wage jobs are less likely to complete high school (of whom are more likely to be unemployed). According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, adolescents who experienced a lack of health and sociability had fathers who were not working or both parents were unemployed (Weston, 1993). Shaw et al (1994) suggests that children's behavioral difficulties and their capacity to change through time have been related to family stress induced by poverty and unemployment.

Unemployment is also causing a significant amount of estrangement among teens and young adults. According to Australian and international research, unemployment and health are inextricably linked (Smith, 1987; National Health Strategy, 1992). This is true for a variety of chronic illnesses and specific causes of death such as pneumonia, influenza, diabetes and bronchitis (National Health Strategy, 1992). As such, the development of mental illnesses including depression are attributed to unemployment (Smith, 1987).

Additionally, the labor market continues to provide huge difficulties for young people with disabilities. Ethnicity, especially among young migrants, can contribute to social exclusion and marginalization in some nations. As such, there is a need to grant "second chances" for adolescents who are unable to finish their schooling and training or successfully advance into employment through job attachments or sponsored training programs. However, the expense of these programs is significant on a per-capita basis. Therefore, it is crucial that social services, economic opportunities, and educational programs for young people "get it right the first time."

However, young people's employment issues go beyond formal unemployment, and focusing only on the ratio of unemployed young people can be misleading because it ignores factors such as the period of underemployment, wages below the poverty line level, subpar labor standards, and a lack of social protection. Youth who have dropped out of school, are not actively looking for work, are not in the labor force due to a disability, spend time in household duties, or are simply discouraged from entering the labor force after competing unsuccessfully with a large pool of peers for a limited number of openings, need to be given special attention.

In summary, social development is hampered by youth unemployment. It can cause anger and low self-esteem, and it can make certain young people more susceptible to drugs, illness, and criminality. Unemployment among young adults has also been found to result in reduced happiness as well as health problems among the youth. Youth unemployment increases the chances of alcohol and drug abuse to gain either financial status or to reduce boredom. It creates dependency on social grants which affect the economy.

2.7.1 Social Impact on OECD Countries during post-2008 crisis

According to the most recent OECD Economic Outlook (No. 84, November 2008), numerous countries' labor markets are fast deteriorating owing to the recession affecting the

region's economy. The OECD predicts that the unemployment rate on average within the OECD region would rise from 5.5 per cent to 6.3% in the final quarter of 2008, a year earlier. The unemployment rate is expected to increase over the next year and a half, peaking at 7.3% in the second quarter of 2010. These projections suggest that the OECD region's unemployment rate will rise to 42.1 million in 2010 from 34 million unemployed individuals in 2008, marking the region's quickest increase in unemployment since the early 1990s.

Trends and projections for the next two years show marked differences among OECD countries. For instance, the United States of America, where the unemployment rate rose to 6.5% in October 2010 and the number of jobs lost in back-to-back months hit a record high, saw the downturn in economic activity earlier than other countries. Currently, more than 2.8 million more unemployed persons in the United States than there were a year ago. In the EU-15, unemployment is also rising, albeit more slowly. However, unemployment notably increased in Ireland and Spain in 2008 due to a massive decrease in construction of homes that led to significant job losses in the sector, but not significantly in France or particularly in Germany. Moreover, employment is declining in Japan, and the unemployment rate has been rising since the year's beginning, although from low levels.

Future predictions suggested that in 2009, the loss of jobs will increase more across the OECD region and until 2010, growth with regards to employment will not resume. This means that with the close of 2009, the unemployment rate was predicted to be at least 2 percentage points higher than it was at the end of 2007 in six OECD countries—New Zealand, Spain, Iceland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States—and between 1-2 percentage points higher in nine other countries, including the nations of Australia, France, Canada, and Italy. According to historical precedent, groups more likely to be affected by rising unemployment include young people, immigrants, low-skilled workers, and older workers.

Temporary employees are especially sensitive to an economic decline. Workers in particular industries are being hit particularly hard by the recession. As previously mentioned, in countries like Spain and Ireland, construction is one of the most impacted businesses where a large influx in residential development has mirrored a response to a sharp increase in prices for housing. In the year preceding the second quarter of 2008, employment in the construction industry had declined by 6%, even before there was a notable decline in total employment in Ireland. Additionally, some banks and other financial organizations have reported significant layoffs.

The current global economic crisis had a particularly negative impact on young workers, notably in developed countries, which were hit harder and recovered more slowly than emerging markets and developing economies. Is this to say that the labor markets in Spain and Portugal (both of which have very high youth unemployment rates) are less “friendly” to young people than those in Israel and Germany (both of which have relatively low youth unemployment rates)? Have the Spanish and Portuguese markets grown less “friendly” to young people in the previous four years? As a result, instead of a shift in views about employing the youth, the major cause of youth unemployment rates in Spain and Portugal rising was the result of poor economic health in these nations over the previous years.

Unemployment among adults was substantially lower than unemployment among the youth, according to OECD data. The economic crisis that affected the world has had an especially negative toll on young people. In 2010, almost 15 million young people in the OECD region were unemployed, which was an approximate four million increase than at the end of 2007 (Scarpetta et al., 2010).

An OECD study looked at unemployment data in 34 OECD nations over the years of the economic crisis (2007–2009) and recovery and economic development (2009–2011) to see if young worker unemployment was caused by the business cycle. Unemployment statistics for

young employees (15–24) and older individuals (55–64) in each nation were examined and the difference computed for both categories. The information was gathered from OECD publications and included growth rates from 2007 to 2011.

According to the analysis of unemployment statistics in these 34 OECD nations, in 2007, 13.4 percent of young people were unemployed, rising to 18.9 percent in 2011, resulting in a 5.55 per cent difference in youth unemployment prior to and after the economic crisis. The average rate of adult unemployment in 2007 was 4%, compared to 5.8% in 2011, resulting in a delta of 1.88 for adults. Both discrepancies were statistically significant, with the delta for young individuals being substantially higher than the delta for adults. These data showed that the recession caused a considerable increase in unemployment among young people (15–24).

Overall, studies have discovered behavioral differences between the jobless and certain NEETs, however the analysis varied in where they recommended distinguishing differences between participants and non-participants in the labor force. It is generally understood that non-employment as well as unemployment can have long-term implications with regards to pay and employment penalties later in life (Gregg, 2001, and Gregg and Tominey, 2005, Cockx and Picchio, 2011). A new study has shown that unemployment has ramifications in terms of its detrimental impact on young people's social capital and trust (Eurofound, 2012). These latter impacts are likely to contribute to the phenomena of social exclusion, having both an immediate detrimental impact on young people's wellbeing and a longer-term negative impact owing to the pay and employment penalties.

2.7.2 Social Impact on Youth Unemployment as a result of COVID-19

Since February 2020, young people have had the greatest employment losses among all age groups of employees. This is so because young people are more prone to work in the COVID-19 industries and occupations with the highest job losses, have the lowest likelihood

of being able to work from home and have the highest likelihood of being unemployed or underemployed as a group. Even though young employees have historically been at a disadvantage in poor countries, the recent recession has had an even greater negative impact on them. The massive volume of unemployment insurance claims and the enormous net job losses showed how much worse the job market performed since February 2020. Given current historical growth and payroll employment that is 7% below its February level, the U.S. economy still confronts a jobs gap of over 12 million jobs even with employment gains in May, June, July, and August (Gould, 2020).

The International Labor Organization, based on an approximate 188 million persons without work in 2019, predicted a growth in world-wide unemployment by 2020 from 5.3 million to an estimated 24.7 million people. Unemployment was forecasted to rise by 13 million individuals in a "middle" scenario. A decreased use of goods and services resulted from the loss of labor income, potentially pushing many employees into poverty. Individuals such as young people without jobs; females; non-protected workers and migrant workers; elderly persons; underemployed people and those with underlying health issues was disproportionately affected by the crisis, which exacerbated inequality.

According to an ECLAC (2020) specially published research, the service industries in the Caribbean as well as Latin America, due to their reliance on interpersonal relationships, were most negatively impacted. The sectors most likely to see job losses were business services, social services, transportation, and commerce, which together accounted for 64% of the region's formal employment. Furthermore, because informal activities heavily relied on interpersonal relationships, they made up 53 percent of the region's employment, which suffered as a result. Indeed, the Caribbean and Latin America's social situation was deteriorating even before the COVID-19 pandemic, as seen by increased rates of extreme poverty and poor overall, enduring inequities, and pervasive discontent. In this setting, the crisis most certainly negatively affected health, education, employment and poverty.

2.7.2.1 Health

Due to a scarcity of trained labor and medical supplies, as well as rising expenses, the health industry was severely impacted. Most countries had made insufficient investments with regards to health. In the year 2018, the federal government's investment in the sector was 2.2% of the region's GDP (ECLAC, 2019; United Nations, 2020), which is significantly less than the allotment of 6% GDP suggested by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The Pan American Health Organization recommended such an allocation in the context of world-wide access to healthcare and health coverage to reduce inequities and advance financial stability. More resources that are focused on preventing illnesses would help to fortify the first line of defense (PAHO, 2019).

2.7.2.2 Education

As of March 20, 2020, all educational programs in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador, Jamaica, Paraguay, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had ended. In Brazil, closures of local schools have been adopted, where 85 million pupils in the area consume meals that include breakfast, a snack, or lunch at school (FAO/WFP, 2019). As a result, ensuring the continuation of school food programs is critical.

As of March 23, 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic had caused teens and children more than 154 million to miss school (UNICEF, 2020). This number amounted to over 95 per cent of children in the region who were enrolled in education. Teachers' training in information and

communication technologies were a difficulty in Latin America (ICT). Only 20% of Brazilian teachers finished a course for continuing education on using computers and the Internet in the classroom in 2018. Sixteen per cent of instructors claimed to use the Internet daily or more than that, 20 per cent weekly, and 18 per cent a minimum of once every month (Brazilian Internet Steering Committee, 2019).

2.7.2.3 Employment and Poverty

It is anticipated that the crisis would increase informal labor as a means of survival. In the Caribbean and Latin America in 2016, 53.1% of workers were employed in the unorganized sector (ILO, 2018). ECLAC found that between 2014 and 2018, the region's poverty rate increased (ECLAC, 2019). The existing rates in relation to severe poverty (11.0%) and poverty (30.3%) are expected to climb noticeably higher owing to the pandemic's indirect and direct effects.

Aside from the previously mentioned declining economic trends that limit youth employment opportunities, there are numerous social and cultural factors that have a multiplier effect on the precarious employment situation in addition to contributing to the economy's decline and the political climate's deterioration. These factors also pose insurmountable obstacles to the growth of a strong and positive labor force. Aside from the ever-growing problem of unemployment in the Caribbean, there are distinct unfavorable sociocultural factors, youth behavior, and unemployment effects.

Early sexual initiation and hazardous conduct, teenage pregnancy, physical and sexual abuse, criminality and violence, substance addiction, school dropout, low self-esteem, and social isolation are examples of these difficulties (World Bank, 2008). All of this contributes to the perpetuation of the poverty and unemployment cycle, which increases more unemployment and poverty for current and future generations. Not only do the aforementioned

issues inhibit youth development and their effective integration into the labor field, but they also come at exorbitant prices to communities and governments as well as people and their families. The Caribbean economies, which are already struggling due to the global recession and the continuing epidemic, can ill afford these additional expenses.

2.8 Economic Impact of Youth Unemployment

Unemployment as it pertains to young people has a significant impact on the economy. Such a negative impact on economic growth and productivity because of high levels of youth unemployment cannot and should not be ignored. Indeed, the economic impact of youth unemployment is significant and far-reaching as youth unemployment has a major and wide-ranging impact on the economy. According to UNAIDS (2012), there are approximately 25% of unemployed individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 in South Africa. Consequently, these individuals as well as their families and society at large are significantly impacted by this. Both the families of the unemployed and the youth themselves suffer greatly when there is unemployment.

Additionally, it may result in issues like drug misuse, criminal activity, and social isolation. More generally, because they reduce demand for goods and services, high teenage unemployment rates harm economic stability and growth. As it relates to personal wellbeing, young people who are unemployed have a higher risk of losing their jobs during economic downturns or periods of instability in comparison to older workers. Additionally, they are more likely to be denied entry to programs of cheap education and training that would help them locate new jobs. When it comes to family welfare, young adults without jobs are more likely than older workers to experience family dissolution. Due to low pay or poor benefits, they are also more prone to encounter financial difficulties. To supplement their incomes, they are therefore more inclined to turn to crime or other illicit activities.

Lacking professional experience, recent graduates frequently get caught in a vicious cycle. They cannot get employment because they lack the experience required to fill a position. As a result, they have a far longer job search period than experienced workers, which damages their future employment prospects and causes gaps in their career history. Young individuals who are having trouble finding permanent jobs are forced to take temporary jobs, which are not always seen as "real" work experience by employers. Having these experiences stated on a CV does not always make it easier to secure employment.

Furthermore, temporary positions are less protected, frequently paid less, and may not provide social benefits or training specific to the job. Young individuals without jobs thus have the weakest career prospects. It is impossible to ignore the detrimental effects that high youth unemployment has on productivity and economic growth. Since many graduates leaving universities cannot find work to produce innovative economic growth, there is a possible risk of talent and skills lost to add value to the economy. Additionally, a large majority of the unemployed youthful labor force lowers productivity and GDP, while raising the country's economic costs as more money is spent on benefits.

Employers, therefore, play a critical role in addressing youth unemployment because they offer the employment opportunities that young people need to enter the workforce and interact with them in other ways to assist them in their career preparation. The Employment Tax Incentive (ETI) Act was introduced by the South African government in January 2014 in recognition of the crucial role that businesses can play in assisting young job seekers in finding employment. This statute, also referred to as the youth wage subsidy, enables companies to deduct a portion of their tax payments for hiring young employees who meet specified criteria. By lowering the amount of PAYE due to SARS, the legislation encourages employers to take on young workers while lowering the cost of employment for the company.

Unemployment has far-reaching economic effects, including underutilization of manpower because of underutilization of human resources. Since jobless people only live as consumers rather than producers, it is a waste of society's resources and a loss of economic production. As a result, if one lives as a consumer, one will tally up consumption rather than output. Consumers don't work and don't save for the future; thus, capital formation is minimal. As a result of these repercussions, there is generally a low level of productivity and future output because of disguised unemployment, which means there is less surplus from an output for future generations, due to fewer resources.

Since the 1970s, unemployment has steadily grown and stayed high in most English-speaking Caribbean countries, particularly among the youth. Current rates of 20% and more are not uncommon, according to Ball and Hofstetter (2009), Archibald, Lewis-Bynoe and Moore (2011), Craigwell, Mathouraparsad and Maurin (2011). High levels of unemployment that are consistent can have significant social, political and economic consequences, including social instability, poverty, and crime, to name a few. Furthermore, as individuals get a better understanding of the financial results associated with corporate wealth, income distribution, and economic growth, the problem of consistently high unemployment has become even more pressing (Borda, Craigwell, Gbaguidi and Maurin, 2012).

Several opinions and explanations of the Caribbean region's unemployment problem have been published (McIntyre, 1975; Harewood, 1978; Farrell, 1980; Downes and Henry, 1994). However, economic investigations of the drivers of unemployment in the region have been limited owing to labor market data that is scarce. Prior to the year 2000, when there was a paucity of empirical literature, Craigwell and Warner (2000) discovered that researchers focused on the Caribbean's more developed nations – such like Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago – owing to data availability. They also determined that output fluctuations are a

significant explanatory variable, as is lagged unemployment to a lesser amount, with the influence of wages and prices being mixed.

Ball and Hofstetter (2009) utilized data from 19 Latin American and Caribbean nations to conduct research on unemployment in the Caribbean area. They concluded that rural population had a strong negative statistical connection with long-term unemployment rates. However, growth per capita, although important, was not as significant as they hypothesized. In their study on Caribbean labor markets analysis of demand-driven shocks, by using an unbalanced panel model of the region's more developed and less developed nations, Archibald, Lewis-Bynoe, and Moore (2011) discovered that economic shocks on a global level can have substantial effects on unemployment.

An additional piece of study on unemployment in the Caribbean used nonlinear models to validate the hysteresis hypothesis, which states that there is a type of memory of events that leads to the immutability of unemployment even while the labor market is changing (Craigwell, Mathouraparsad and Maurin, 2011). In summary, youth unemployment indeed has a negative impact on economic growth and productivity. It can lead to social exclusion and unrest. Unemployment at a young age can have long-lasting, negative effects, particularly with respect to career paths and future earnings.

2.8.1 Effects of Economic Fallout as a result of Coronavirus

In comparison to other areas of the world, the Caribbean, like Latin America, was more susceptible to the pandemic. In particular, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), (2019), forecasted that the region's growth would have reached a maximum of 1.3% in 2020 before the pandemic. However, considering the crisis' impacts, this projection was reduced, and gross domestic product was now expected to decrease by at least 1.8 per cent. Nonetheless, as the pandemic progressed, projections of economic reductions of 3% to 4%, or possibly more, cannot be ruled out. Actions done at all levels including national, regional, and global will determine the final economic effect.

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world economy was already struggling. The average worldwide growth rate from 2011 to 2019 was 2.8 percent, substantially lower than the 3.4 percent seen from 1997 to 2006. With a growth rate of about 2.5 percent in 2019, the world economy had its weakest year since 2009. Predictions for the global GDP growth rate in 2020 had been revised downward, even before the pandemic. As the pandemic grew worse, projections were reduced. For example, Goldman Sachs forecasted annual GDP reductions of 3.8 percent in the US, 9% in the Eurozone, 2.1 percent in Japan, and merely 3% in China for the 24th of March 2020 (Goldman Sachs, 2020).

It is possible that economies may experience a medium-term recession in this scenario, with no rapid signs of recovery. From a monetary perspective, liquidity had decreased due to several factors including a reduction in demand at the domestic level, the halt of activity within the economy, the disruption of distribution channels and payment chains, and the loss of wealth and profitability. Additionally, the volatility of the financial markets had significantly increased due to the uncertainty surrounding the severity and duration of the epidemic as well as the economic stagnation. The COVID-19 issue had accelerated many structural changes that have been in the planning stage for the past decade. For instance, forced quarantine has hastened the virtualization of social and economic connections; teleworking is spreading to more sectors of the economy; and digitization is progressing quickly.

With this paradigm shift, the most technologically advanced enterprises, notably micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs), will be able to surpass the less technologically advanced ones. Longer worker quarantine periods would promote automation and robot investment. To solve the staff shortage caused by the quarantine, many enterprises had stepped up their high-tech service with the usage of artificial intelligence technologies. The coronavirus has influenced the people who are considered most vulnerable, such as workers in the informal sector.

It has also affected the jobs available in the labor market (increased unemployment and underemployment), and the nature of the vocations (lower income and social protection). Because MSMEs accounted for 61.1% of all employment in 2016 and 47.1% of all employment when medium-sized enterprises were included, the impact on MSMEs in the economy will lead to a significant social cost (Dini and Stumpo, 2018).

The worldwide job crisis has had an especially negative impact on young people. During economic downturns, youth are typically the first ones to lose jobs and the last to re-enter the labor force when the economy improves. In 2009, over 40% of the world's 211 million jobless individuals – or roughly 81 million – were between the ages of 15 and 24. In 2009 alone, the number of jobless teenagers grew by 6.7 million. Canada, the United States, and the European Union (EU) experienced the largest annual increases in young unemployment rates (4.6 percentage points between 2008 and 2009). The huge number of young people working in low-quality, low-paying occupations with irregular and insecure work arrangements, especially in the informal sector, added to the gloomy unemployment picture in many nations.

Unemployment and underemployment among young people resulted in wasted chances for economic growth and development. If there were not enough employment for young women and men, increased labor market pressure may have led to societal unrest. Effective transition strategies from school to work, on the other hand, would have helped young people develop professionally and personally. This kind of support is especially important to mitigate the negative impact of the job crisis on young people's employment chances. Longer periods of unemployment relate to more unfavorable outcomes of unemployment. Short periods of abrasive unemployment are an unavoidable part of the job seeking process.

Young people experience joblessness more frequently than adults as they are less set in their professional choices and more mobile than adults. This is one of the reasons why youthful unemployment rates are substantially higher than those of prime-age people, with the exception

of countries having a dual apprenticeship system (O'Higgins, 2001). Some are of the opinion that rising young unemployment is not as bad as it appears because jobless periods are usually brief; however, in reality, the case is sometimes otherwise (O'Higgins, 2003; Ryan, 2001).

Unemployment among the youth in the age category of 15 to 24 has gradually increased throughout Europe, rising from around 16% in 2007 to 23.5 percent in September 2013. Ireland has had greater growth throughout this time span, growing from around 9% in 2007 to 28% in September 2013. According to Eurostat monthly unemployment figures reported by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), this translates to over 60,000 young people. Individuals, businesses, and communities can all suffer because of youth unemployment. This can result in a detrimental impact on young people's future employment (scarring) and financial capability. Some young people may have ill health because of it, as well as social isolation. In Ireland, the economic burden for young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) was estimated to be €4.3 billion in 2011, or 2.8% of GDP. This expense may result in higher demand for public services, a decrease in politically active young, and a more socially divided society.

On a macroeconomic level, high youth unemployment can lead to lower productivity since young employees are less likely to introduce new skills and innovation into industrial processes (Oireachtas Library and Research Service, 2013). One also must consider the financial burden to the government of losing tax revenue from many unemployed people, in addition to the cost of welfare payments, and associated program spending. As aforementioned, according to a recent Eurofound study, the economic costs in relation to young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) was approximately €153 billion in the year 2011. The cost to Ireland in that same year was estimated to be at €4.3 billion, or 2.8 percent of GDP (Mascherine et al, 2012). It is crucial to remember that this figure only pertains to NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29.

Young unemployment's emotional and economic repercussions can have far-reaching consequences that affect society in general. Poor mental health and wellbeing, as well as decreased levels of happiness, can lead to an increase in demand for public health services (European Youth Forum, 2011). Furthermore, the numerous types of social isolation that young unemployed individuals might suffer increase the likelihood of a divided society (Kieselbach, 2003).

There is renewed interest in how young unemployment may affect labor market institutions and overall unemployment in the future, prompting new scholarly efforts to be discussed. Among others, Ellwood (1982), Gregg and Tominey (2005), and Dao and Loungani (2010), hypothesized on the long-term consequences of teenage unemployment and predicted similar developments. In Europe, the OECD (2013) also examined the impact of young people's prospective labor mobility surrounding the composition of labor markets and performance in the economy. Economic crises, it is believed, must have a greater influence on the youth population than on any other age group.

According to this theory, severe economic consequences have a significant impact on young people's future trajectory, including their living quality, savings, and decisions for investment. If steps are not taken by the authorities to prevent growing young unemployment rates, unanticipated consequences are likely to occur, with their diminishing income leading to destitution. Reduced income would limit access to several facilities that are critical to European communities (European Youth Forum, 2014).

Unemployment has a direct impact on the economic position of a country, causing recession and slowing growth, and youth unemployment and underemployment, have a direct impact on the lives of young people. In terms of impact, this can be assessed from a personal perspective as well as from a social and economic one (Oireachtas Library and Research Service, 2013). In terms of the economic consequences of young unemployment, they include reduced productivity, lower GDP, high expenses and payments, lower tax revenues, and so on.

Should the alarmingly high percentage of unemployment in the youth population persist, the number of young people without work in the EU will rise, resulting in a loss of skills and human capital on a long-term basis for the economy (Dhéret, 2013). Moreover, there are the societal costs that have arisen owing to the crisis. Hence, significant demands on public services will be generated because of discomfort or depressed states of health, mental starvation, and solitude (Oireachtas Library and Research Service, 2013). All these developments are connected to the generational impact of youth unemployment. These variables impede the economy's smooth operation and real-time performance by influencing the labor market and the dynamics with regards to demand and supply (Essays UK, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic effects are particularly difficult for Caribbean economies that rely heavily on the travel and tourism industry. Economic losses are projected to be between 5% and 6% of GDP for the Western Caribbean and between 15% and 20% of GDP for the Eastern Caribbean. To decrease the economic crisis, Caribbean economies have been implementing urgent fiscal and monetary measures. Except for Barbados, which disclosed a fiscal package reaching 19% of GDP, the measures vary from 1% to 4% of GDP. Budgets are already under pressure, and the risks associated with high levels of debt are being further exacerbated by the expenditures necessary to avert a protracted recession and a healthcare crisis. In 2019, ten of the fifteen economies within the Caribbean had debt to GDP ratios of greater than sixty percent. Additionally, towards the end of 2019, the average cost of debt servicing accounted for little under 30% of total government revenue. From 2009 to 2019, the economies with the largest debt payment burdens were Antigua and Barbuda (45%), Barbados (46%) and Jamaica (66%).

The financial system's stability is fundamentally at danger due to the debt accumulation since poor growth and excessive debt might exacerbate existing liquidity issues and lead to

bankruptcy crises. However, the subregion's selection of policy tools is extremely constrained, especially for its smaller economies. Therefore, quick action involving the use of novel policy and financial tools is essential to help the subregion meet the fiscal and development challenges caused by COVID-19.

2.8.2 Economic Assessment of Coronavirus in the Eastern Caribbean

Following the onslaught of the Coronavirus, the Caribbean's 11.7% average unemployment rate in 2019 was unchanged from that of 2018, but certain nations saw improvements. The unemployment rates in the Bahamas and Barbados remained at 10.7% and 10.1%, respectively, from 2018, but they fell in countries like Saint Lucia, Grenada, Jamaica, and Belize. Both Grenada and Saint Lucia, members of the ECCU, experienced the biggest drops with a rate of 5.4 and 3.1 percentage points respectively. As a result of the increase in the implementation of specific training-based employment development programs and changes in economic activity, unemployment has been falling lower in this subregion. The COVID-19 outbreak had a serious impact on employment because most Caribbean countries relied heavily on tourism.

According to early projections by ECLAC (2020), the Caribbean will experience a nine-percentage point decline in total employment, in comparison to a two-percentage point decline in Latin America. The highest employment decreases will occur in Saint Kitts & Nevis as well as Saint Lucia, The Bahamas and Antigua and Barbuda, all at a rate of over 13 percentage points. As a result of the slowdown in tourism, however, Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago's economies that produce goods will only see minor variations with respect to their overall employment (all below the level of one percentage point).

Due to the size of the crisis and the speed at which it was spreading, international organizations had made a significant effort to understand its ramifications, potential effects,

and mitigating measures at the global, regional, and sub-regional levels. Naturally, most of these studies pay more attention to macroeconomic or fiscal issues than they do to the social effects of the crisis. According to a recent United Nations (UN) research paper on the effect of COVID-19 on children, they will also be impacted, despite not being the face of the pandemic (United Nations, 2020).

In the Eastern Caribbean Area, there are presently about 800,000 children and young people aged 0 to 24, accounting for a significant proportion of the population: in particular, one third (United Nations, 2019). Around 70% (570,000) of this group are under the age of 18 and 30% (230,000) are between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age. The crisis has largely affected young people in the same manner that it has affected the rest of the population - by lowering living standards and restricting travel. However, some of the impacts are specific to children and teenagers. These risks could endanger both their current well-being and their ability to succeed in the future development of the nation if they are not addressed.

High unemployment would continue to be a result of containment efforts taken by governments around the world, particularly in the Eastern Caribbean Area, to combat the COVID-19 epidemic, such as corporate closures and travel restrictions. The Caribbean nations won't be immune to these effects; many jobs in the private sector will continue to disappear, and others will experience large reductions in pay or earnings. The impact will be particularly severe in nations that rely significantly on tourism, which has been described as "on the verge of collapse" (OECS Authority, 2020).

The average pre-COVID-19 unemployment rate in the East Caribbean Area is 12%, according to a recent analysis, however there are significant regional variations, with rates ranging as low as 5% in the British Virgin Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago to a high 27% in Grenada. Except for two of these nations, the rates for youth unemployment have exceeded double the general average.

COVID-19 is expected to result in the loss of 300,000 employments throughout the eight Eastern Caribbean Area nations and territories. As a result of the pandemic, the unemployment rate on average for the nations covered in the analysis is expected to rise from 8% to 35%, a total of 26 percentage points. This is a fourfold increase, with relative changes in nations with lower unemployment rates being larger. As a result of the pandemic's impact, youth unemployment would skyrocket, rising from 27% to more than 50%. These are significant increases, yet they are not improbable.

Within the ECA, youth unemployment is already high, at 27% – more than double that of the general population; and a large majority are already facing persistent joblessness. In Barbados and Saint Lucia, respectively, 56 and 77 percent of those jobless were either never employed or have been unemployed for half a year or longer (UNICEF, 2020). According to estimates, young unemployment will increase in relative terms owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The premise that a large proportion of young people live with their families only increases the chances of more tense family situations.

Although experiencing a recession can have a long-term negative impact on a worker's employment and compensation in general, these impacts are especially harmful for younger people who are just entering the workforce and have little to no job experience. Even though unemployment rates rise for all workers during recessions, regardless of age, race or ethnicity, gender, or level of education, the rate for younger workers frequently rises faster and higher than that of older workers for a variety of reasons, including the trend of hiring employers away from less experienced workers (Forsythe, 2019). Young people's careers that begin during the recent recession are likely to have long-term negative implications, such as repeated unemployment spells as well as lower wages and lifetime earnings, unless the economy quickly returns to pre-pandemic conditions, which is unlikely given current health conditions and the lack of additional government assistance and stimulus.

According to an economic examination of unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago, a significant problem occurs among the labor force's younger generations. Young girls have a high rate of unemployment. Over time, changes in economic activity have had a major influence on the country's unemployment rate. Economic growth plays the most important influence in lowering unemployment, according to econometric research. Increases in real earnings and real loan rates have a negative influence on the unemployment rate, particularly over time. Even though Trinidad and Tobago employ a wide definition of unemployed, which contributes to the country's relatively high unemployment rates, the underlying economic fundamentals are important to lowering unemployment (i.e., economic growth, wage restraint, lower real interest rates). Although the government has attempted to address the problem of young unemployment through training and placement programs, more work is needed to develop the economy to mitigate the problem. In the long run, this would prevent unemployment from becoming a serious socioeconomic issue.

In this economy, the most vulnerable workers are among the young. They frequently labor in the sectors and professions that have seen the greatest job losses because of the COVID-19 closure, have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than older employees, and are less likely to fit the criteria of working from home. Younger employees than older workers face longer lasting and worse labor market results during recessions. This recession brought on by the coronavirus could last for months or even beyond into years. There will probably be detrimental effects for years to come, given what we know about the long-term effects of recessions on young employees. However, they also stand to gain significantly when the national unemployment rate is exceptionally low and maintains that level for an extended period. Indeed, young employees have more obstacles in labor markets that are in bad condition.

2.9 Review of similar government-implemented safety net/public policy programs

2.9.1 Grenada

To address the problem of high unemployment among the youthful populace, some Caribbean governments, from time to time, undertake and implement programs and projects geared toward social development. However, the concern lies in the sustainability and quality of impact on its intended target market. For example, in addition to other safety net programs like school feeding programs and care-givers programs, the Government of Grenada introduced the Support for Education Empowerment and Development (SEED) program to provide extensive support in several need-based areas with the primary aim of assisting poor children and families in acquiring a solid education.

According to Grenada's 2010 Social Safety Net Assessment, some of the findings revealed that levels of high unemployment were primarily driven by female and youth unemployment; unemployment levels were approximately 25% in 2008 and underemployment was as huge a concern as unemployment. The assessment also highlighted the primary risks facing youth and adolescents with regards to low human capital development and confirmed that 10% of young men and 8% of young women (ages 15-29) had withdrawn from the labor market for no specified reason in addition to those who were unable to find work.

Implemented under the umbrella of the Department of Social Services in Grenada, with the primary objective to alleviate poverty, SEED targeted low-income students, poor children, and the disabled and indigent poor. However, when critically examined against the poverty profile of Grenada's population together with the wide range of risks and vulnerabilities existing, the program revealed some existing challenges and weaknesses as presented by the 2010 Assessment. Some of these included inadequate protection and inequitable coverage for all its participants as well as operational weaknesses (fragmentation, duplication etc.) in the

system; prompting the need for reform and a new approach to address the gaps, in order to evolve into a comprehensive tool to eradicate poverty on a long-term basis.

2.9.2 Antigua and Barbuda

Additionally, the Ministry of Labor in Antigua and Barbuda, under the umbrella of OSEC: the One-Stop Employment Centre, offered employment and training opportunities to unemployed youths. The One-Stop Employment Centre (OSEC) offered services ranging from job placements, training and referrals and an active Labor Market Programme which prepared young people for the workforce. The One Stop Employment Center of the Labor Department oversaw the management of ABSTEP: the Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Programme.

According to OSEC's Facebook postdated 23 January 2015, in order to provide training in park and recreational grounds management, the Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Programme (ABSTEP) teamed up with the GARD Center and the National Parks Authority. Fifteen (15) job seekers were placed on a Nature Parks and Recreation Grounds Maintenance Sub-Project carried out as part of ABSTEP's Temporary Employment Program by the GARD Center in partnership with the National Parks Authority. The aim of this exercise was for the National Parks Authority and the GARD Center to teach those chosen to work with them on how to manage parks' grounds, trails, and historical sites. The sub-project comprised reviving recreational areas for locals and visitors to use and enjoy. This government initiative called ABSTEP provided the legal citizens of Antigua and Barbuda who were between the ages of 17 and 50 with temporary employment and training possibilities. The program's goal was to assist recipients in finding and keeping jobs. However, the program soon became unsustainable and was short-lived.

Based on an ILO report published in 2019, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Public Safety and Labor in Antigua and Barbuda had implemented an Active Labor Market Programme, which aimed to increase employment opportunities in the country. In this context, the Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Programme 2015–18 (ABSTEP) was administered by the Labor Department's One Stop Employment Centre as part of the World Bank-funded Public and Social Sector Transformation Project. The ABSTEP was designed with two components: the Temporary Employment Programme (TEP) and the Training Programme (TP). The TEP was geared toward providing income support to the less experienced, low-income unemployed through a temporary (six-month) job experience plus life-skills training, whereas the TP aimed to provide retraining and competence certification to the more experienced among this population.

Notably, while three cohorts of the TEP were successfully completed, the TP was not launched and as of 2014 the ABSTEP Programme was discontinued. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda indicated that the Labor Department is currently undertaking the New Work Experience Programme, sponsored by local government, which enables young workers aged 18–35 to gain work experience through quick placements. It was noted that this programme was recently rebranded to include varying categories of employment. At the time of reporting, the New Work Programme had placed 532 trainees, of whom 121 had gained permanent work.

2.9.3 Saint Vincent & the Grenadines

On the island of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, youth unemployment is a key concern. For many young people, being unable to participate meaningfully in socially and economically useful activities is a major barrier to achieving economic independence. The main issue the youth face is that they don't engage in many economic activities. Consequently, many of them seek short fixes to economic "freedom" through unlawful activities, especially the young men.

Over 111,000 people live in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The youth population, which is the total number of people between the ages of 15 and 30, makes up around 30% of this amount. When the issue of youth unemployment is taken into consideration, the difficulty of reducing poverty and the requirement to boost youth involvement become evident. Youth poverty rates reflect the effects of such low employment rates, and poverty itself has been known to compel a large percentage of young people into the labor force at a young age, leading to an increase in the number of young people who drop out of school before entering the labor field. Thus, to combat high youth unemployment in St Vincent and the Grenadines, according to a related 2019 post from Caricom Today, the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines took steps to implement a Training of Trainers Creativity for Empowerment and Business Opportunity (CEBO) Workshop. During the project's initial pilot phase, the CARICOM Secretariat collaborated with Member States and development organizations to put the CEBO Programme into action. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Governments of Italy, Japan, and Spain, as well as other organizations, have supported the program. The European Union has also provided support for this new phase of the project with funds from the 10th Economic Development Fund (EDF).

The Creativeness for Employment and Business Opportunity (CEBO) project's goal is to encourage and engage young CARICOM citizens to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. To combat adolescent unemployment, reduce drug misuse, crime, and violence, and promote economic resilience, it targets people from all areas of life, both in and out of school. The CEBO model consists of the following elements: Partnership Meetings, Regional Training of Trainers, Community-Based Workshops, Business Development Workshops, and National Training of Trainers. It was piloted in five Member States in 2012–2013 and implemented in a further seven Member States in 2014–2015.

2.9.4 *Saint Lucia*

Similarly, the high rate of unemployment on the island of Saint Lucia is the most concerning socioeconomic issue for policymakers. Between 2007 and 2013, the population of Saint Lucia is expected to have grown by 5.9%, while the labor force expanded by 21.8 percent. During the same time span, the jobless rate rose by 10.3 percentage points. That percentage has varied over the previous two decades, ranging from just over 16.0 percent to over 25.0 percent. Between 2004 and 2007, the government made great progress in reducing unemployment, which peaked at 14.0 percent in 2007. Since 2007, there has been a reverse in that pattern, with the unemployment rate rising, which has alarmed policymakers. As a result of estimates done by the Ministry of Finance (2013), the unemployment rate in Saint Lucia increased to 24.9 percent towards the end of that year. As a result of this occurrence, the authorities have taken a variety of steps. One such is the Holistic Possibilities for Personal Empowerment (HOPE) program in 2009 launched by the Saint Lucia Social Development Fund to provide employment, training, and economic opportunities for the unemployed.

As of 2013, HOPE was in its fifth year of operation, and the program had employed over 4,000 people. Through minor infrastructure projects and private sector jobs, it primarily targeted 17-30 years old and participants were engaged in on-the-job training. From an analysis of the program on an annual basis, the number of people employed increased in the second year of implementation but declined over the subsequent three years. The number of positions offered in the program decreased by 16.7% in the 2013/14 fiscal year compared to the previous year. HOPE offered a wage subsidy, usually 50%, but had to pay the full salary of recipients who worked in the private sector on occasion. The program's administrators are of the view that the intervention has fulfilled its objectives, but given the country's present budgetary problems, the question of its long-term viability and sustainability is critical.

2.9.5 *Commonwealth of Dominica*

On the other hand, by contrast, the National Employment Programme (NEP), launched in December 2013 by the Government of Dominica has been hailed “a working success story.” The Dominican government launched the NEP as a program to help young people find employment. It was created because of the Cabinet of Ministers' realization that society must play a role in shaping and fostering the present generation of Dominicans who are youthful and entrepreneurial. The Venezuelan government provided subsidies to finance the NEP, which cost over \$7 million. The Dominica Labor Party administration understood that bright and educated young Dominicans must be rewarded with profitable and fulfilling employment even with the threat of the greatest global economic crisis.

With the National Employment Programme, young people have been hired by a range of public and private sector organizations and departments. The AID Bank, DOMLEC, and LIME Dominica are just a few examples of these. The NEP focuses on providing employment in both the commercial and public sectors to stimulate new ideas, new approaches, fresh energy, and innovation, as opposed to the outrageous and unattainable promises of thousands of jobs in unidentified sectors and industries made by some.

According to a 2020 report by Caribbean News Global, using funds from Citizenship by Investment (CBI), the Commonwealth of Dominica is expanding its social safety-net programs and initiatives to preserve employment for economic viability and the improvement of residents' livelihoods affected by COVID-19. The National Employment Programme (NEP), which costs the government EC\$3.7 million per month, was maintained by the government throughout the COVID-19 lockdown. The program supports long-term economic growth while

assisting young people in finding internships and jobs, developing their skills, enhancing human potential, and enhancing local communities. The CBI program in Dominica is one of many initiatives promoting employment and economic growth. At the time of reporting, CBI funds have helped 4,500 firms and 3,896 interns.

2.10 Safety net programs versus Public policy programs

Safety net programs and public policy programs are two different types of programs that aim to help people in need. Safety net programs are designed to aid individuals and families who are struggling financially while public policy programs, on the other hand, are designed to address broader social issues such as education, healthcare, environmental protection and unemployment. As such, numerous safety net programs automatically grew temporarily throughout the recession and more recently during the COVID- 19 pandemic, as is expected when the economy weakens, and the unemployment rate rises.

Safety net benefits account for barely 13% of the poor's income and spending in low-income nations. While Latin American and Caribbean nations spend an average of US\$158 per citizen yearly on safety net programs, Sub-Saharan African nations spend just an average of US\$16 per inhabitant. Globally, safety net programs cost emerging and transitional economies an average of 1.5% of GDP. Based on an update from the World Bank as of March 2019, research has shown how safety net cash transfers assist governments to invest in human capital while simultaneously providing the poor with a source of income to raise their level of living. Over 650 million people, or 56% of the poorest quintile, and over 2.5 billion individuals are currently protected by safety net programs (World Bank, 2018).

While safety net programs are focused on providing immediate assistance to those in need, these programs are often targeted at specific groups of people. Programs that provide a

social safety net can be extremely important in combating young unemployment. They can give young people who are having a hard time finding employment financial support, which can help to minimize poverty and social exclusion. They can also offer training and education programs to assist young people in gaining the knowledge and experience required to enter the workforce. Studies have demonstrated that social safety net initiatives can help lower youth unemployment. For instance, research by the International Labor Organization (ILO) discovered that cash transfer programs can aid in lowering youth unemployment by raising household income and decreasing the need for young people to take up low-wage, precarious jobs.

Similar to this, a World Bank study discovered that by giving young people the knowledge and experience necessary to compete in the job market, training programs can help to boost their employment prospects. However, the effectiveness of social safety net programs can be limited by several factors. For example, the design of these programs can be complex and difficult to administer, which can lead to high administrative costs and a lack of targeting. In addition, some programs may be subject to political interference or corruption, which can undermine their effectiveness.

Safety net policies have always been seen primarily as ways to reduce existing poverty and misery. Notwithstanding, evidence has been accumulated from many notable research studies to confirm that homes where children receive basic income support result in positive effects on a long-term basis toward disadvantaged children. This is noted particularly through the stages of their development to adulthood, from educational achievement to secondary school graduation to obtaining jobs in the labor market. Take for instance, a study by Gordon Dahl and Lance Lochner (2012), conducted in relation to children exposed to a sizable EITC boost in the 1990s, resulted in a marked improvement in their math and reading test results. Increased EITC and Child Tax Credit income and increases in pupils' test scores are correlated, according to research by Harvard economist Raj Chetty and colleagues (2011). They came to

the conclusion that getting EITC as a child resulted in significantly higher earnings and employment rates as an adult based on these data and the significant connections between educational attainment and future wages.

Additional proof of the long-term implications of income support and other types of assistance was provided because of a groundbreaking study conducted concerning the beneficial effects of food stamps upon children. In a comparison made with similarly poor children from countries that had access to food stamps at the time with those who had not yet implemented the program, under the guidance of economist Hilary Hoynes of the University of California at Berkeley, the researchers used the unequal implementation of the Food Stamp Program in the early 1970s. When researchers examined the records of these children as they grew older, they found that early food stamp use was associated with higher rates in relation to high school graduation by 18 percentage points, lower rates of metabolic syndrome, and in particular, higher levels of "self-sufficiency" in girls. Economists Greg Duncan and Katherine Magnuson calculate that a sustained rise in income of \$3,000 for families with young children and limited resources leads to an average increase in earnings of 17% and an increase in work hours of 135 per year when the children are adults. This estimate is consistent with these and other studies.

An increasing number of studies indicates that youngsters who experience persistent levels of stress high enough to harm the neural connections forming in their developing brains, impede their capacity to achieve success in educational institutions, and hinder them from developing the emotional and social competencies they must acquire to function as successful adults. Living in unsafe neighborhoods, in families who struggle to make ends meet or put food on the table, or with parents who find it difficult to balance their daily responsibilities are just a few of these difficult situations. Additional studies concluded that hypertension, early-

onset arthritis, and other disorders previously connected to early childhood traumas could partly account for the shorter labor hours and lower salaries of people who were reared in poverty. Programs designed to help families with children pay for basic needs appear to increase as well as improve children's long-term outcomes, at least by lowering the additional stress that parents or children may encounter if they are unable to put food on the table or pay their bills, subsequently lessening the negative effects that poverty-related stress can have on the development of young minds. It is imperative to conduct more study in this area, which could yield significant policy-relevant discoveries.

From an assessment of these government initiatives, they lack one common fundamental trait – that is, the ability to migrate from a mere social safety net program to a sustainable social policy program. Public policy programs are designed to benefit society as a whole and to address long-term social issues. The discussion has changed slightly because of the execution of adjustment programs in many countries, moving away from the focus on short-term safety nets and toward proper policies relating to macroeconomics combined with longer-term expenditures in sectors like health, education, and employment. Spending on longer-term social welfare programs, notably education, has a positive impact on growth and, as a result, the reduction of poverty, according to recent research looking at the long-debated relationship between inequality and growth.

From a political and administrative standpoint, it is much easier to set up temporary safety net programs than it is to restructure the public sector entities that deliver crucial services. This may have resulted in an overemphasis on safety nets at the expense of attention to the institutions that provide essential social services, at least in Latin America and Africa, along with concern about the immediate costs of adjustment.

Two reasons have been cited for the mixed record of cross-regional safety nets. According to economist and scientist, Carol Lee Graham (1997), the lessons learned from these interventions show that, in some instances, safety net policies have been successful in assisting the weak and disadvantaged while also assisting in the political sustainability of economic reform. In other instances, however, they have only served as temporary bandages to stem the opposition of politically outspoken groups with unfortunately, very little impact on either the elimination of poverty or the longer-term political viability of reform.

Firstly, the entire policy framework is critically important. In the absence of long-term strategies to foster sustainable growth, safety nets cannot reduce poverty or even provide adequate social welfare protection. Safety nets are temporary solutions that can be crucial during times of transition. Yet, the advantages they offer—such as temporary work and income support—cannot be a replacement for fundamental social welfare programs like primary health care and education or for macroeconomic reform and sustainable growth. Moreover, safety nets must support the macroeconomic reform program's overall goals rather than working against them; they must not lead to fiscal deficits or labor market distortions.

The second factor contributing to the uneven performance of safety nets is the clear trade-offs between providing benefits to the politically active versus those in need, and their implementation is not devoid of political limitations. According to conventional thinking and common practice, the poor doesn't have a strong voice in politics, and governments enacting reform in the face of fierce political rhetoric unfortunately have little incentives to concentrate safety net benefits on the most vulnerable citizens. Therefore, the poorest people are frequently less directly impacted by adjustment methods than slightly wealthier urban consumers. Governments typically react to this political trade-off by prioritizing outspoken groups over groups in need when implementing reform, by allocating most of the rewards to compensate for the efforts of the politically outspoken groups (Graham, 1997).

Notwithstanding, there are successful examples of nations that carry out significant macroeconomic reforms that ultimately lead to growth and in which safety nets play a significant role in the reform process. There are various designs for effective safety netting. Examples from Chile and Bolivia show how differing political and institutional environments influence the selection of a safety net program.

In Chile, reform was carried out in a highly established institutional setting and under an authoritarian rule. The government was able to concentrate its efforts on the most underserved areas by utilizing a vast network of nutrition programs for mother and child that already existed. Several public works job programs were also created with the poorest people in mind by keeping the wage level well below the minimum. For those who could afford them, private alternatives were created, while governmental social services were restructured to assist the less fortunate. During the crisis years, social spending as a percentage of the population fell, although for the poorest deciles it rose.

During the severe recession, these safety nets were essential for ensuring the wellbeing of the impoverished. For instance, in 1982, the unemployment rate reached a high of nearly 30% of the workforce. Nonetheless, during the years of the crisis, welfare measures like infant mortality not only kept improving but did so more quickly. In the case of Chile, its reasonably effective public sector institutions in addition to the broad, pre-existing social welfare system made it possible for it to achieve its record. The political environment also had an impact; unlike the Pinochet regime, a democratic government could encounter more challenges in reallocating social assistance funds to the poorest instead of the middle class. Yet it's crucial to remember that since Chile's transition to democracy, the targeted strategy has been maintained and even expanded.

When compared to Chile, Bolivia's poverty rate and less developed institutions were significantly greater. The demand-based Emergency Social Fund (ESF), the first of its kind, was established by the government in Bolivia. Its projects were allocated based on beneficiary submissions, and they were carried out locally by local governments, non-profit organizations, and the corporate sector. Even though the ESF was unable to target the poorest sectors since they were the least prepared to present viable project proposals (1 million individuals out of a population of 7 million benefited from ESF projects), the program was nonetheless able to reach a sizable percentage of the poor at a key period. The ESF simultaneously gave local institutional and organizational capability a crucial boost. With the completion of adjustment, the Social Investment Fund (SIF), which replaced the ESF, has been operating under the same fundamental principles.

However, rather than temporary job provision, there is an exclusive focus on health and education benefits in collaboration with the line ministries. The Chilean experience highlights how crucial it is to concentrate social programs and safety net efforts on those who are in need to offer meaningful protection. The Bolivian example, on the other hand, highlights the significance of including the poor's participation as well as local institutions to improve the maintenance of initiatives to reduce poverty (Graham, 1997).

Governments must, in fact, be cognizant of the issues surrounding youth unemployment and move promptly to put the right remedies into place. In European nations, owing to the recently generated job opportunities by the green economy, social and medical services, and technology for communication and information, a significant increase in youth unemployment has been observed. It has been recognized that these industries possess significant potential to generate jobs in Europe. Reductions in contributions to social security; payment of all or a portion of newly hired employees' social security contributions made by the government for a predetermined period; supplying credit facilities to businesses that will create job

opportunities; provision of long-term skills development courses and public training for work; and training initiatives for the job are some of the policy instruments to reduce the number of unemployed individuals. Many countries experienced very little or no growth levels during the financial crisis of 2008, but this was mostly due to successful measures designed to reduce youth unemployment. The new policy measures Turkey introduced in April 2009 to reduce youth unemployment could be used as a template for initiatives of a similar nature in other countries.

The experience provides some critical lessons for future safety net policy as well as social welfare policy generally, even though safety net attempts in emerging countries have had varied results. The effectiveness of targeted social safety net benefits has highlighted how vital social services like health, education, and employment are frequently distributed disproportionately to wealthier groups in many countries and how important is the need for social welfare benefits generally to be targeted.

Although social spending needs to be at a reasonable level—and during the financial crisis, several Latin American countries saw their social spending fall much below desired levels—the allocation of spending is just as important as the overall quantities, if not more so. Only 18% of the poorest income categories in Brazil, which make up almost forty per cent of the population, are protected by the country's social security scheme, and they only receive 3% of its benefits. Higher education costs account for more than 50% of Venezuela's total education budget. This emphasizes how crucial it is to build safety nets within a larger framework of macroeconomic transformation. When they are conducted successfully and incorporate essential ideas like focusing on the poorest and incorporating beneficiary engagement, safety net programs can act as a catalyst and provide guiding principles to governments for the larger process of social sector reform (Graham, 1997).

In summary, safety net programs provide immediate assistance to those in need while public policy programs address broader social issues. However, both types of programs play an important role in helping people and improving society. It can therefore be concluded that if a social safety net strategy implemented by any government is to successfully transform lives and families, it must address not only income-related issues, but also the hurdles that marginalize the poor and vulnerable over-time and prevent them from receiving essential services. It is on this premise that the researcher seeks to critically assess STEP, a similar public policy intervention launched by the Federal administration of Saint Kitts and Nevis to address the sustainability of its impact on the increasing phenomenon of youth unemployment within the said economy.

2.11 Summary

The first section of the literature review was used to identify and establish the theoretical and conceptual framework on which to build the research study. The researcher presented a balanced view of the historical and current literature on the subject matter and portrayed theorists that provided a rationale for the selection of the framework. The major hypothesis was to acknowledge or refute the notion that the implementation of the STEP safety net program implemented by the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment to the economy. This framework was developed in tandem with the main research question and relevant sub-questions outlined below:

Main Research Question: To what extent has STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?

Research sub-questions:

- What are the most significant features of the STEP?
- To what extent it is easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

- What economic impact in St. Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?
- What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP program?

The first section was then followed by a review of the literature sectioned into six main themes, namely *Productivity*, *Job-search*, *Labor Market*, *Social Relationship Exclusion*, *Social Impact* and *Economic Impact*; all highlighting various concepts such as *skills mismatch*, *allocative effectiveness*, *full employment* and *social isolation* under relevant headings.

An outline of the productivity theory portrayed a brief review of the early theorists which highlighted the perspectives and findings of Smith (2009), Marx (1867), Taylor (2004), Fayol (1969), Barnard (1968), Verdoorn (1949) and Kaldor (1966). The status-centered approach, the cost-conscious approach, and the output-centered view, in which productivity is defined as the units of products created as well as the number of political decisions made, are Fajonyomi's (1996) three major approaches to his theory of unemployment (Fajonyomi, 1996). While Krugman (1994) found no discernible trend between productivity and unemployment among some rich nations, Maddison (1982) and Grill & Zanalda (1995) both suggested a positive link with real GDP in developing countries between the 1960s and 1980s. The significant disparity between teenage unemployment and labor productivity between 1991 and 1996, however, suggests that there may have been a correlation—or perhaps an inverse relationship—between productivity and unemployment during that time.

Additionally, productivity was examined in view of the current Covid-19 pandemic and based on a United Nations News report, sectors such as food and lodging, manufacturing, retail and wholesale and business organizations, which accounted for 37.5% of global employment, were identified as the four areas containing high employment and low productivity that were

most likely to be affected by the virus with regards to decreased productivity (United Nations News, 2020). The subject and variables of teleworking in relation to productivity was briefly mentioned with regards to the work of Beckmann (2016) and Godart Gorg, and Hanley (2017) who reported higher productivity and innovation intensities resulting from telework in German establishments. Notably, assumptions that telework reduces worker happiness owing to loneliness, concealed overtime or unsuitable home/work environment were noted and would have to be studied in detail within the context of St Kitts and Nevis in a post-pandemic era.

This section also looked at factors impacting the supply side of the labor market as well as interventions to stimulate the demand side. Researchers like Blattman and Ralston (2015) and Fox and Kaul (2017) argue that the impact of these interventions is not only unsustainable but far from being cost-effective. Blattman and Ralston (2015) assert that state-sponsored cash-for-work schemes (like STEP) encourage labor demand and are more common in middle-income countries on the demand side (such as St Kitts and Nevis), noting that these programs ought to be considered as ‘safety net programs’ offering a basic pay to the poor instead of employment programs. According to Fox and Kaul (2017), different investigations have had mixed results; some were ineffectual and in certain countries, employment was delayed. Overall, job creation for youth is viewed as an indirect impact of such interventions and must be further researched in middle-income countries such as St Kitts and Nevis, given their population socio-economic dynamics.

The theory of job search was addressed under the sub-headings of job creation, matching and skills mismatch. From research conducted in Nigeria, Torruam and Abur (2014) was of the view that providing the proper skills to young people must be prioritized by increasing jobs through small businesses and poverty alleviation initiatives. However, from a

Caribbean labor market perspective, findings from an IMF study (2014) resulting from a sample of Caribbean countries confirmed that the process of job creation has been somewhat restricted by structural and institutional impediments. The findings also revealed that inadequate labor market information, low levels of labor productivity and mismatch between skills and jobs are common challenges throughout Caribbean labor markets, requiring the need for structural reform.

With respect to the concepts of matching and skills mismatch, the question was considered as to whether there was a fundamental skills mismatch driving high unemployment within the Caribbean as arguments were presented for and against. On one hand, De Koning and Jong (2014) discovered substantial skill shortages in Grenada's labor market, while an IMF (2015) study on the 2012 National Labor Market Needs Survey in Saint Lucia revealed that 60% of job seekers possessed less than a secondary level education and 75% of job vacancies required it. However, with regards to Saint Lucia, a closer examination of the facts in a subsequent IMF (2019) Working Paper, revealed that the previous sampling may have been skewed resulting in biased results. Be that as it may, the need for further research on these concepts with regards to a skills training program in St Kitts and Nevis is indeed necessary to determine the prevailing and underlying causes of youth unemployment in that labor market and economy.

A brief overview of early labor market theorists like Alfred Marshall and A. C. Pigou on perfect labor market competition provided Keynes (1937) with the opportunity to express his disagreement with the classical theorists and argue that unemployment could only be frictional when the labor market is in equilibrium and the marginal product of labor equals the disutility of labor. Further to this introduction, three basic groupings of alternative theories

were highlighted under the area of contemporary labor market theories to address labor market imbalances. These groupings were characterized first as segmentation, where the issue of labor force mobility constraint is a key factor in explaining labor market imbalances; second, where unbalance can be created by a long-term labor market adjustment process (like job-searching); and third, by the inflexibility of salaries as the source of labor market disequilibrium (Krynska, 2000).

Two key concepts of labor market theory were examined: *allocative efficiency* and *full employment*. Based on the Kaldor-Hicks (1939) criterion, a result is more effective when those who are more fortunate compensate those who are not. Thus, when items within a society are produced at a level where price equals marginal cost, the concept and process of allocating efficiency is therefore achieved. Additionally, the concept of full employment was also identified and explained in that, this refers to the most skilled and unskilled workers that are employed in each economy at any one time. In the context of labor market theory, the similarities and differences between structural, frictional and cyclical unemployment was noted. Whereas the organizational set-up of the economy with all its market structures, demographic trends and regulations is characterized as structural unemployment, frictional unemployment is a kind of structural unemployment that mostly speaks to temporary unemployed periods owing to job search and matching difficulties. On the other hand, cyclical unemployment differs from structural and frictional, in that, it is primarily driven by short-term economic fluctuations (Layard et al., 1991).

From a review of the literature, documented in OECD (2006) and Orlandi (2012), labor market rigidities account for a major share of structural unemployment in about two-thirds of OECD nations. Additionally, from an IMF (2019) study attempting to explain high unemployment, a calculation of unit labor expenses for the early 2000s and mid-2010s revealed findings of a positive and significant relationship between approximated unit labor costs and unemployment in both instances.

with double-digit unemployment rates, such as Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, have remained significantly higher than in nations with lower unemployment rates, like Antigua and Barbuda and St Kitts-Nevis.

Within this theme, several concepts were highlighted including *social inclusion* and *integration*, *social isolation* and *social policy mechanisms*. According to Perri (2004), government policy can influence people's social networks and encourage social integration, whereas social policy execution can lead to isolation within a society. As such, the social policy mechanism establishes how social policy affects and influences a person's social networks. To improve the working capacity of unemployed youngsters, the government can provide training and connect them with business owners. This would help to create social platforms that are connected so that jobless people may broaden their social networks and learn more about potential employment opportunities, improving their chances of obtaining employment more quickly (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1999).

From the literature, some important drivers of social exclusion among youth were listed as poor educational attainment, personal characteristics-based discrimination, monetary poverty, unemployment, lack of housing or legal status in the host country, living in isolated geographic locations, and juvenile delinquency. In general, social exclusion refers to both the conditions that result in and maintain a person's inability to fully participate in social, cultural, political, and economic life. Aspects of social exclusion, for instance, show the economic, political, and social exploitation that excluded people go through. The enforced inability to exercise fundamental human rights like the right to an education, the right to a job with a living wage, the right to health and well-being, and the right to vote and to compete for public office may be seen as a form of this deprivation (UNDP, 2007).

It is the researcher's intention at the completion of this study, to identify and determine what aspects of these theories are demonstrated in the STEP program implemented by the Government for the citizens of St Kitts and Nevis.

Unemployment was identified as one of the most pressing challenges confronting today's economies and examples of different forms of unemployment noted, included seasonal unemployment, disguised unemployment, rural unemployment, urban unemployment, industrial unemployment and educated unemployment. From a societal level, excessive youth unemployment tends to jeopardize the operation of social security systems, which rely on sufficient mandatory contributions from employees to function and survive (Isengard, 2003).

According to Dixon (1992), EPAC (1992) and Cass (1988), there are a wide range of personal and social consequences attached to unemployment such as financial poverty, housing instability, family conflicts, marginalization, stigmatization, loss of confidence and negative health; and the majority of these issues commensurate with the length of unemployment. From an assessment of the social impact on 34 OECD countries after the 2008 global crisis, the data revealed that the recession caused a considerable increase in unemployment among young people ages 15 – 24. Similarly, in the face of COVID-19, according to a study produced by ECLAC (2020), the services sectors in the Caribbean and Latin America were the most affected due to social distance and quarantine measures. The sectors most likely to lose jobs were trade, transportation, business services and social services which accounted for 64% of formal employment in the region. With a prediction of unemployment rising by 13 million individuals, the pandemic is expected to have a detrimental influence with regards to health and education, poverty and employment.

In the last section of the review, focus was placed on the final theme relating to the economic impact of youth unemployment. However, economic investigations of the drivers of unemployment within the region were limited because of the scarcity of labor market data. Craigwell and Warner (2000) discovered that previous researchers focused more on the developed nations of the Caribbean like Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad as data was more readily available.

The Caribbean is more vulnerable to the pandemic than the other regions of the world because of its small size, just like Latin America. Indeed, the impact seen and felt by the coronavirus with regards to increased unemployment and underemployment is reflected in the number of available jobs, the standard and quality of work provided, and those with the greatest need for protection, such as individuals employed in the informal sector. Since MSMEs accounted for 61.1% of total employment in 2016 when medium-sized businesses were considered, the economic impact on MSMEs will have a significant social cost (Dini and Stumpo, 2019). Indeed, the young population have been particularly negatively impacted by the global employment crisis, as youth are typically the slowest to return to the workforce whenever an economy rebounds after a job loss during times of recession.

As a follow up to the final theme, the researcher examined five other Caribbean countries besides St Kitts and Nevis: namely Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia and Dominica. Here, a comparative review of similar safety net programs that existed on these islands was done to highlight some of the similarities and differences among them. In this review, the researcher also discussed the importance and need for these small-island governments to transition their safety net programs which are generally seen as temporary quick fixes to sustainable public policy programs that will transcend their

political terms in office and make a greater and lasting impact on their citizens and by extension, their economies.

From an examination of these six themes which underpin the subject of youth unemployment and its prevailing issues, the need for this study is even more pressing to find the necessary answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

One billion young people are expected to enter the workforce in the upcoming ten years, and many of them will likely work irregular or informal jobs. According to projections purported by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the number of young people without jobs worldwide is predicted to hit 71 million in 2016 and remain at that level through 2017. Youth are around three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, and nearly 90% of all young people reside in developing nations. On a global scale, the startling facts reveal that 621 million young people aged 15 to 24 are not enrolled in school, employed, or in training, while 75 million young people have training but no jobs.

This dissertation topic focused on a social issue related to the rising rate of youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis. Although there are many causes of youth unemployment, one of the main ones is the prolonged global recession and financial crisis, from which the globe is currently recovering. Young employees are more vulnerable to financial setbacks than older and more seasoned workers because they hold more temporary or no-contract positions and are more inclined to change occupations in search of better professions (Lee et al., 2013). Additionally, the skills that young people possess might not be suitable for the jobs that do exist. According to a 2014 ILO survey, between 25 and 45% of employed people in 24 European countries are either over- or under-qualified for their jobs (Risk of a Jobless Recovery? 2014).

This mixed methods research goal was to investigate and analyze the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) to determine whether its implementation by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis had any direct effect on the reduction of youth unemployment in the St. Kitts and Nevis economy. It has been extensively shown that youth unemployment has a detrimental impact on a society's economic and social conditions.

Since a large percentage of school dropouts find it challenging to find a profession and apply their knowledge and advancement to the commitment of financial development, this poses the risk of a loss of talents and capacities. Hence, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the sustainability of this skills training program's implementation in relation to the reduction of youth unemployment and societal economic gain, as well as to pinpoint areas that need improvement.

Assessing the effectiveness of STEP toward youth unemployment reduction within the economy of St Kitts and Nevis was accomplished through an examination of a number of objectives, which included determining the most significant features of the STEP that guide its objectives; determining the extent to which interns of STEP have increased their chances for employment compared to those who have not participated in the program; examining the activities of the program to determine which of them have a greater impact on the economy and discovering opportunities and solutions for a better policy design.

It can be concluded that, one of the most pressing economic and social issues defying small island developing nations is the significant levels of youth unemployment, and more research is needed to determine the link or association between youth unemployment and the success of social safety nets and public policies to enhance better economic performance and increase well-being for the citizenry, particularly the youth. As such, the issue addressed by this study is a social problem pertaining to the increase of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis. The issue of youth unemployment in an economy such as St Kitts and Nevis can be linked to theories of productivity, job creation and economic growth as postulated by various scholars as addressed in the literature.

From a worldwide perspective, much research has been done concerning the issues surrounding youth unemployment. However, within the Caribbean diaspora, and particularly

within small island economies like St. Kitts and Nevis, insufficient research has been conducted to discover findings of the hidden causes and commitments to the problem; and sustainable measures that might be adopted to address such. Hence, the purpose of this research was to investigate and examine the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) and the extent of its impact on the reduction of youth unemployment within the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Research conducted within the larger territories of the Caribbean points to high levels of youth unemployment as a negative contributor affecting these economies. Thus, the motivation behind this study examined safety net programs such as STEP and their impact on the levels of youth unemployment in small-island economies such as St. Kitts and Nevis. Youth unemployment, to a large degree, has been demonstrated to negatively affect the financial and social conditions of any society. Consequently, this presents the danger of a loss of abilities and capacities as tremendous proportions of school leavers find it difficult to obtain a line of profession and use their insight and advancement toward the commitment of financial development. In this regard, this study sought to find viable solutions to this long-standing problem of youth unemployment within developing nations.

To accomplish this, the researcher employed a mixed-methods approach involving the use of qualitative and quantitative data, combining the elements of primary and secondary research to analyze the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) initiated by the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis to determine the extent of its impact on the reduction of youth unemployment on the economy. With the use of interviews, focus group studies and questionnaires, data was collected and analyzed to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the program and determine the extent to which STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis, which was the overarching goal of the study.

In this chapter, the researcher examined and discussed in detail the research approach and design of the study as well as the reasons for the researcher's selection of choice. The researcher is cognizant of the fact that the dependability of the findings is significantly influenced by the research design. Consequently, this aspect of the research offers a strong foundation for the entire research and is necessary because it enables the efficient running of numerous research operations. This maximizes knowledge while using the least amount of time, money, and effort, making the research as productive as possible. This segment of the chapter is followed by a section outlining the population and sample of the research investigation and a description of the instruments used in the study to gather the relevant data. As it is typically impractical to investigate the complete population, studies are done on samples. Conclusions made from samples are meant to be extrapolated to the entire population, and occasionally even to the future. Consequently, the sample must be representative of the population.

With regards to the population and sample of this study, the researcher selected a mixed methods sampling design in keeping with the use of both data sets and the relationship of the qualitative and quantitative samples. The next section of the chapter features a detailed examination and discussion of each construct and the operational variables used in this mixed-methods approach along with their definition in relation to the study. This segment is succeeded by an assessment of the study procedures and ethical methods employed in the study. The researcher then outlined the data collection processes and how the results of the findings was analyzed; finally ending the chapter with a summary of the key points highlighted.

For this study, within the context of an exploratory sequential design approach quantifying the time orientation, the researcher selected a parallel relationship pertaining to both sample sets indicating that separate samples were drawn from the same population for each data set. Purposive sampling was used for the qualitative data while probability random sampling was utilized for the quantitative data. Sequential mixed methods design permits researchers to triangulate the outcomes from the different qualitative and quantitative parts of the examination accordingly, taking into account affirmation, cross-approval and validation of discoveries inside a solitary report. According to Creswell et al., (2003), this mix of test procedures is expected to yield the most extreme outcomes while tending to the issues of youth unemployment from the two points of view.

3.1 Research Approach and Design

Recent decades have seen researchers using mixed methods approaches refer to them as combined, multi-method, or hybrid (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). However, according to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), a complete list of mixed method designs does not appear to exist. Mixed approach may not incorporate quantitative or qualitative methodologies (Morse and Niehaus, 2016). Yet, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) describe it as combining quantitative and/or qualitative data into one investigation so that their advantages can be combined. Depending on how data is collected, the quantitative and qualitative phases may be completed simultaneously or in a different order (Creswell, Fetters, and Ivankova, 2004).

An exploratory sequential mixed methods design was the research methodology recognized and chosen by the researcher for this investigation. This typology identifies three types of sequential mixed methods designs which are described as sequential exploratory, sequential explanatory, and sequential transformative. When the qualitative strand comes first, followed by the quantitative strand this is characterized as exploratory sequential designs.

Contrarily, explanatory mixed-methods studies use the qualitative strand after the quantitative one and offer justifications for the quantitative study's conclusions. Sequential transformation starts with the collection and analysis of data, whether it be quantitative or qualitative. The results are then combined during the interpretation stage, with the aim of using the techniques that best support a theoretical viewpoint.

Exploratory research, as the name suggests, does not try to offer certain solutions to existing issues, but rather just to study the research questions. This type of study is frequently conducted to explore a subject that is not yet fully understood. Exploratory research is carried out to identify a problem's nature. It is intended to aid the researcher in learning more about the issue, which in this case is youth unemployment, rather than to provide definitive evidence (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A., 2012).

Sequential approaches initially record quantitative or qualitative data, while the second stage records the other type of data. To be more precise, a stage of gathering and analyzing qualitative data is followed by a stage of gathering and analyzing quantitative data, and a stage of integrating data or linking from the two different strands of data is the final stage. This procedure characterizes the exploratory sequential mixed methods design, where two independent stages of data collection occur one after the other. The fact that such a strategy gives the first set of data time to be analyzed and can, thus, guide the latter stage is one of its advantages.

According to Heesen et al. (2019), one of the key benefits of utilizing an exploratory sequential technique is that it offers substantially more robust validity. Flick asserts that the QUAL methodological style based on interviews is appropriate for resolving open issues as well as for constructing and expanding theories based on such discoveries. Large amounts of

data are produced by interviews, enabling the study of subdomains of concepts. Additionally, interviews are the best direct data collection method for understanding the complexity and depth of issues. The hypothesis is supported by the concepts gathered from the extensive data set. Bajpai (2016) claims that primary sources of data offer a variety of advantages when discussing the survey QUAN methodological approach. Since primary data are collected individually, it is claimed that they are generally applicable to the research goals. In terms of comparison, combining the use of QUAL and QUAN methodologies in a single research work offers a greater chance to develop a deeper understanding of the research topic while also reaching a higher level of precision and accuracy.

The researcher examined the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis to ascertain its effects and impact on youth unemployment and the economy of the twin-island Federation. The objective of the study was to assess the extent to which this social safety net program was sustainable in correlation to the reduction of youth unemployment within the country and to identify areas for improvement.

Hence, for this investigation, the researcher utilized exploratory research within a sequential mixed methods design approach (triangulation) that involved both qualitative and quantitative data (Morse, 1991). Semi-structured interviews and focus study group discussions occurred during a 4-6 week period to collect qualitative data. An interview that is semi-structured is a qualitative research instrument which incorporates a set of open questions that are pre-determined and intended to spark debate with the chance for the interviewer to further delve into certain responses or topics. In this case, the interviewer did not rely solely on a set of standardized questions but adopted spontaneity when gathering relevant information from the respondents in line with the purpose of the interview.

The researcher was able to develop new questions based on the responses provided by the interviewees; hence, the researcher was able to gather more in-depth and reliable information about the research subject. The best way to learn more about your audience, how they behave, and the things that influence their decisions is through focus groups. They are quick to reproduce across groups and places, let you measure responses rather than just opinions, and save time. In this study, the purpose of focus groups was used by the researcher to gather qualitative data on the participant's opinion on a product or idea; in this case, the STEP. Focus groups are one of the most effective and popular market research methods available. Used to gather qualitative data and in-depth insights, they enable researchers to collect information on anything from products and services to beliefs and perceptions to reveal true customer attitudes and opinions.

Quantitative data was then obtained from a random sample of 150 persons selected from the national registry list from among the 14 parishes in St. Kitts and Nevis. Participants were officially contacted in writing via email or WhatsApp messaging with a follow-up call to confirm receipt of information and obtain consent. The survey instrument incorporated a questionnaire designed for participants from the STEP under investigation. The sample comprised STEP interns, (unemployed) non-STEP participants, government officials, economists, youth and youth workers, and other non-governmental organizations located within the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis. The study utilized on-line questionnaires created by Google Forms as well as telephone, video conference and face to face meetings to gather essential information from respondents among the stakeholder groups identified. Google Forms were disseminated and retrieved within an ensuing 3- 4 week time span.

From a qualitative viewpoint, the data collected from the personal semi-structured interviews in the first phase was assessed and analyzed using Taguette to find out realities and presumptions identifying with the basic reasons for this issue and suggestions for remedial action.

The information was examined to discover various themes and ideas identifying with the research questions, as well as contrasts or likenesses among the equivalent. According to Alexander Di Pofi (2002), qualitative examination is a methodology that investigates or explores human conduct and collaboration concerning a social issue, as in this case, youth unemployment and the effects of a social safety net program.

From a quantitative outlook, data collected in the second phase was analyzed utilizing Excel and SPSS, a factual device for evaluating reviews and discovering relations. As a feature of the investigation, examinations were made of elevated levels of youth unemployment over a particular timeframe (approximately 3 - 5 years), prior to and post-STEP implementation. Notwithstanding SPSS, the researcher also embraced "Pearson Correlation" and "Spearman" to test the connection between the levels of youth unemployment and the components related to this phenomenon as recognized or identified by the respondents. The results of the investigation were displayed using tables, figures, bar charts and graphs.

3.1.1 Appropriateness of the chosen method and design

The exploratory sequential technique, as described by Edmonds and Kennedy (2017), is a progressive strategy that is applied whenever qualitative data is added to quantitative results. To sequentially examine and explain the qualitative findings, quantitative data is used. The qualitative approach is more flexible when it comes to discovering novel ideas since the exploratory sequential method, as opposed to the explanatory sequential approach, analyzes a notion before supporting it. This strategy is chosen for many assignments involving the design of novel instruments since it enables the student to develop the instrument using qualitative data before objectively validating it. Since the first phase uses a tiny sample size, it would still be necessary to create a new measurement instrument even if saturation were to be reached because the type of information provided is unpredictable, including whether it will result in a predictable or non-parametric framework.

The researcher's choice of research methodology and design seemed to be the most appropriate for this kind of study and the anticipated outcomes. Rigid mixed methods design combining several data analytic tools are necessary for the seamless transfer of evidence between qualitative and quantitative modes. Such designs can combine the strength of qualitative analysis' "deep structure" explanatory descriptions with the confirming results of quantitative multivariate analysis.

A researcher would use the exploratory-sequence technique, which is a sequential approach, when he or she wants to follow up qualitative discoveries with quantitative analysis. For researchers developing innovative instruments, taxonomies, or treatment procedures, this two-phase technique is particularly helpful (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), as in the case of the STEP program initiated by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis. The instrument or treatment is built with the help of the qualitative (exploratory) results from the first phase and is then tested in the second phase (quantitative). In general, this approach is beneficial to point out important variables (in Phase 1), for later quantitative analysis when variables are unknown or uncertain (in Phase 2), as in the case of youth unemployment.

Bernard (2014) asserts that the use of mixed methods techniques has increased cross-disciplinary collaboration and innovative research. It allows for a more creative and expansive approach to study by tackling bigger issues (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The mixed methodologies approach is a multi-level tactic that incorporates a two-phase strategy (for example, qualitative research first, followed by quantitative research); as well as a planned and methodical approach to research (Creswell, 1994; Flick, 2011). The third phase, where qualitative data can reflect experience and depth and quantitative data can show broad trends, will be reached once each phase has been triangulated (Newby, 2014).

Additionally, qualitative data can also be used to boost data validity (Bazeley, 2002; Orgard, 2005), contextualize and enrich findings (Bryman, 2007), and create new knowledge (Stange, 2006).

3.1.2 Alternative approaches considered but not appropriate

In the early stages of selecting the research approach and design, a case study with a specific focus on the issue within the context of St. Kitts and Nevis was initially considered by the researcher. The main advantage of a case study is that it gives the researcher a chance to study one aspect of a real-world problem in detail from many different viewpoints. Notwithstanding, there are several drawbacks to the case study which made that selection inappropriate for the study of a phenomenon such as youth unemployment that affects a wide cross-section of the population. For example, case study research lacks scientific rigor and provides little basis for generalization of results to the wider population, due to the small sample size. In addition, the researchers' own subjective feelings may influence the case study (researcher bias) and this type of study is known to be time-consuming, costly and difficult to replicate.

Additionally, for this study, a qualitative approach was also considered over a quantitative approach but from further review and continuous assessment, the researcher concluded that a single qualitative approach had its own limitations and would not be most appropriate for the type of exploratory research to be undertaken within the study of a social phenomenon. Indeed, the qualitative approach has limitations, such as challenges in reliably integrating information across observations or cases and identifying linkages and relationships that arise across observations, cases, or constructs (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

In addition, the methodologies of qualitative research frequently lack well laid out prescriptive procedures (Morse, 1991), restricting the ability to draw unambiguous conclusions (confirmatory results), which is a crucial part of scientific research.

Furthermore, small or unrepresentative sample sizes in qualitative research have drawn criticism for restricting the generalizability of their findings. The quantitative approach has similar drawbacks because the emphasis on measurement frequently removes information from its original ecological "real-world" context (Moghaddam, Walker, & Harre, 2003), a practice known as decontextualization (Viruel- Fuentes, 2007).

From an assessment of the above limitations, the researcher is convinced that using a combination of both methodologies can help to gain a better understanding of the subject (Hoover and Krishnamurti, 2010). It can help to increase trust in the results by providing more proof while balancing out the disadvantages of any one technique, in particular (Bryman, 2007; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2003). Although time-consuming, mixed technique research can assist in answering more general questions and give data that might otherwise be missed utilizing a single approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

3.1.3 Design steps with supporting information

Based on the theory purported by Castro and Coe (2007), the basic design of an integrative mixed methods study is generally divided into six steps: (a) research parallelism, (b) evidence gathering, (c) processing/conversion, (d) data analytics, (e) interpretation, and (f) integration. However, for the purpose of this specific sequential exploratory design, the researcher began with the first step identified as the qualitative data collection and analysis phase. Qualitative data was collected from stories of the participants about their reasons, viewpoints and perspectives on the issue of youth unemployment and the STEP program used by the Government to address this issue. The researcher then analyzed these stories to identify the contexts, conditions, circumstances and consequences of youth unemployment. Considering the resulting categories from the qualitative study as variables, the researcher then employed the second step to create a quantitative instrument to collect quantitative data from respondents.

The third step was to use the findings to interpret, assess and determine the overall prevalence of these variables for a larger sample population of employed/unemployed youth.

Theoretically, research with this architecture that is well-designed would enable "seamless" data changes, such as from qualitative subjects to numeric factors (Castro & Coe, 2007). To provide a thorough interpretation of the quantitatively derived results, the statistically created data would next be connected back to their initial descriptive context through recontextualization (Morse, 1991). It is generally easier to interpret, transmit, and comprehend textual and numerical data across modalities the more qualitative-quantitative parallelism that is integrated into a study from the beginning (Plano Clark et al., 2008). A completely integrative method's main objective is to evaluate research findings obtained using both data formats to create "deep structure" conclusions that have a greater degree of explanation than those made using only either a quantitative or qualitative strategy (Castro & Nieri, 2008).

3.1.4 Rationale for the chosen design as the optimum choice to accomplish study intentions

Concurrent, sequential, and conversion are the three methods of mixed methodology identified by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003). However, the researcher's aim was to explore the field of youth unemployment to develop an instrument or typology that may not yet be available but can be accurately utilized as a measure to determine the relevance of such social safety net programs implemented by Caribbean governments to address youth unemployment. In this respect, the sequential design employed by the researcher for this exploratory investigation was considered the optimum choice.

According to Creswell (2013), the quantitative phase (numbers) was followed by the qualitative phase (personal experience) in this study, with the qualitative findings being used as a foundation to contextualize the quantitative data (Creswell, Plano-Clark, Gutmann and Hanson, 2003). Qualitative data can also help develop new knowledge by enhancing and enriching findings (Taylor and Trumbull, 2005; Mason, 2006; Stange, 2006).

In the context of multiple design methodologies, the need for a technique that enables a thorough and integrated assessment of qualitative textual evidence and quantitative numeric data persists (Schwandt, 1994). Given the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative approaches, it would be beneficial to have a truly integrative methodology for the sequential application of both approaches in a way that provides the richness of description provided by text narratives and the accuracy in measurement and hypothesis testing provided by quantitative approaches (Carey, 1993; Hanson et al., 2005).

3.2 Population and Sample of the Research Study

A population is the complete group from which a researcher would like to draw conclusions while a sample is the group from which you will gather data. According to Creswell et al (2012), a population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristic. Since it is frequently impractical to study the entire population, research investigations are typically undertaken on samples. Considering this, inferences drawn from samples are intended to be generalized to the entire population and, on occasion, even to the future. The sample must therefore be representative of the population. Ideally, a random selection should be made from a representative sample of the population.

When probability sampling procedures are applied, such as simple random sampling or stratified sampling, the risk of sample bias is reduced, and internal and external validity are increased. Kothari and Garg (2014) define sampling as the process of selecting representative elements from a given population that will form the sample. Non-probability sampling methods are commonly used in research for practical purposes. Non-probability samples are selected depending on several criteria; they may be less expensive or easier to get. Due to the non-random selection methods, any conclusions drawn from statistics about the wider population will be weaker than with a likelihood sample.

In many disciplines, including business, social sciences, and public health, it is essential to define and measure populations accurately. This is significant for reasons of validity, generalizability, and ethics. The results may not be reliable if the population is not precisely characterized and counted. The results of a study on the prevalence of a disease, for instance, may not be accurate if only a small portion of the population is included. Furthermore, precise population definition and measurement is necessary to guarantee that the findings of a study may be extrapolated to the full population. The results might not apply to different groups or circumstances if the population is not precisely defined or assessed. Lastly, it is morally imperative to define and measure populations accurately. Certain groups or populations may be unfairly treated because of inaccurate or biased population data.

Similarly, accurate sampling and sample size determination are essential in many fields including research, market analysis and quality control for representative results, precision of results and generalizability. When it is impractical or impossible to investigate a whole population, sampling is used. The results can then be applied to the complete population by employing a representative sample. A precise sample guarantees that the findings are impartial and truthful, and that they are representative of the population. In terms of precision, determining the sample size is essential to ensuring the accuracy and dependability of the results. The results of a sample that is too little or too large can be inaccurate or unduly expensive. Also, to ensure that the findings of a study may be generalized to the full population, correct sampling and sample size determination are equally important as accurate population definition and measurement.

From an approximate total number of 2,500 STEP interns on St. Kitts and 600 on Nevis, data was extracted from a representative sample of 150 participants from among primary stakeholder groups in St. Kitts and Nevis. The number of participants comprised 100 interns (80 from St Kitts and 20 from Nevis) with the remaining 50 participants comprising two focus groups of 6 participants in each group, 4 officials of the STEP management team, 4 economists from the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, 4 youth officers in the Department of Youth and 26 unemployed young people from within the community of St Kitts and Nevis.

The survey incorporated semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and questionnaires with participants from the STEP under investigation. The sample population of participants comprised STEP interns, (unemployed) non-STEP participants, government officials, economists, youth workers and youth from among the public. This specific group of individuals are the key players and stakeholders involved in the issue, which lends to the purpose and appropriateness of the study problem. In St. Kitts and Nevis youth are categorized as persons between the ages of 18 and 35; hence the selection of participants that made up the youth population of this study fell within this age group and was represented by male and female alike. Notably the sample represented a greater portion of females to males in the ratio of 75:25 respectively to match the same proportion in the general population size. The study utilized online questionnaires as well as face-to-face interviews to gather essential information from among the stakeholder groups identified.

Data was obtained from a sample population of 150 persons selected from the national registry list from across the 14 parishes in St. Kitts and Nevis. The sample size was broken down to reflect each segment of the study. For instance, of the total sample size of 150, the smaller sample size of 24 represented the qualitative data and 126 was used to represent quantitative data.

A comprehensive list of names and contact information of all STEP interns for St Kitts and Nevis was retrieved from the head office of STEP. The researcher was required to travel eleven miles by ferry to obtain data from interviews conducted with interns and representatives of STEP located on the sister island of Nevis.

Upon receipt of the list of registered interns, participants were randomly selected and officially contacted via email or Whatsapp messaging with a follow-up call to confirm receipt of information and to obtain consent. The 24 interviews held to gather qualitative data were arranged to occur immediately after confirmation and were expected to be conducted within a 4-6 week time frame. Once the data was collected from the interviews and analyzed, 126 questionnaires were disseminated and retrieved during an ensuing 3-week time span to analyze the quantitative aspect of the study.

When the purpose of a study is to generalize from a sample to a larger group, some type of probability sampling is required to ensure that such generalizations are robust. Without the unpredictability that probability sampling entails, it would be difficult to assert that the sample was not selected in a biased manner and that the selection rule was not related to the variables utilized in the study. According to Cross et al (2002), random selection is the only selection process in large-number studies that automatically assures the lack of selection bias. After agreeing on the mixed methods purpose and design type, the researcher selected a mixed methods sampling design.

The relationship that exists between the qualitative and quantitative samples as well as the time orientation (concurrent vs. sequential) are two useful factors in this situation. These connections can be parallel, layered, multilayer, or identical. For this study, within the context of an exploratory sequential design approach quantifying the time orientation, the researcher selected a parallel relationship pertaining to both sample sets. A parallel relationship indicates that separate qualitative and quantitative sample members are drawn from the population in both phases of the study.

It was the researcher's intention to utilize purposive sampling for the collection of qualitative data. Patton (1990), a proponent of purposive sampling proposed a wide number of techniques in relation to this type of sampling. However, for this study, a critical case sampling technique was employed under this option. In exploratory qualitative research, research with constrained resources, and research where only one instance (or a small number of cases) can be significant in interpreting the phenomenon of interest, critical case sampling is a type of purposive sampling approach that is particularly useful. The most important aspect of critical case sampling is without a doubt this one.

On the other hand, the researcher used a probability sampling approach with a stratified sampling methodology to collect data for the sequential phase of data collection in respect to the quantitative data. Stratified sampling is the division of a population into subpopulations that might have substantial differences. This will guarantee that each subgroup in the sample is fairly represented, enabling the researcher to make more precise conclusions. Using this sample strategy, the population was divided into smaller groups (referred to as strata) based on the pertinent attribute (for example, gender, age range, income bracket, or work function). Based on the population's total dimensions, the researcher determined how many people from each category should be sampled, and then used random or systematic selection to select a sample from each subgroup. In the case of this study, the attributes of gender (male and female) and their age range were the relevant factors that were applied.

Although the literature on blended strategy sampling is insufficient but to be grown further, writers, for example, Collins et al (2006), Kemper et al (2003) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) give researchers information on the different sorts of blended approaches dissecting methods perceived as essential, consecutive, simultaneous and staggered sampling procedures.

Sequential mixed methods design permits researchers to triangulate the outcomes from the different qualitative and quantitative parts of the examination, accordingly taking into account affirmation, cross-approval and validation of discoveries inside a solitary report (Creswell et al., 2003). This mix of test procedures is expected to yield the most extreme outcomes while examining the issues of youth unemployment from the two perspectives. From an examination of the research topic, the researcher's intention was to measure the satisfaction level and economic impact of the intervention of STEP upon youth and youth unemployment within the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis.

All things considered, the researcher embraced and utilized blended strategies inspecting methodology as the most fitting sampling strategy in this specific kind of study. A mixed strategy sampling system incorporates the selection of cases or units for an investigation using both likelihood (probability) sampling to construct external authenticity and non-likelihood (purposive) sampling to extend transferability. Likelihood and non-likelihood sampling both offer a response that reacts to the research questions. Experts utilizing direct mixed techniques studies, as often as possible, engage in a trade-off and achieve the best between the necessities of quantitative and qualitative examples in their assessment studies.

Non-likelihood sampling, according to Patton (2002), prompts a more noteworthy profundity of data from fewer painstakingly chosen cases, while likelihood sampling prompts a more prominent expansiveness of data from a bigger number of units. Mason (2002) further features the differentiation between the proper testing edges of likelihood samples and the casual examining edges of non-likelihood samples. In any case, Shulha and Wilson (2003) depict instances of blended investigation methods and the researcher's capacity to inventively join these methodologies in responding to research study.

In this examination, the researcher believed that a blended technique inspection system was most appropriate and was set up to strike an exchange between the necessities of quantitative and qualitative models inside the examination, also called the representativeness/saturation trade-off. As confirmed by Wunsch (1986), the researcher would need the guide to reflect the qualities of the number of occupants of enthusiasm (in this case, unemployed youth), and commonly, this requires a case of a particular size with regards to the people.

In qualitative research, it is crucial to first investigate the main concepts and supporting metrics. It would be simpler for the researcher to connect the types of data collection techniques and the inquiries related to each of the measurements once these two are well-established. With regards to the measurement of constructs, particularly in relation to the qualitative aspect of the study, based on the data obtained, these were determined and measured against the variables identified with the intention to answer the research questions. From the raw data, the researcher captured the mental abstract ideas of the respondents and translated them into concrete, more testable forms through a process of qualitative data coding or thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis, according to Boyatzis (1998), is a technique for locating, examining, and presenting themes or patterns in the data. It thoroughly arranges and summarizes the data set, and frequently goes further to interpret different facets of the research issue. In this mixed methods study, it is the researcher's intention to create and assign codes to further establish themes and patterns to arrive at conclusions. Essentially, coding is the term used for labelling and grouping similar types of data together to make it more manageable and easier to analyze. Good coding is indeed the foundation of high-quality analysis in research as it not only ensures that the data is valid, but that the researcher has undertaken the analysis in a systematic and transparent manner, for others to review.

Reliability and validity are the two most important factors to consider in research when evaluating any measurement tool or instrument. The question of what an instrument measures and its accuracy is known as validity. Reliability is the degree to which any measuring device corrects for random errors, and it refers to the degree of trust that can be placed in the information obtained through the application of a research instrument. These are crucial ideas for contemporary research since they help to improve the precision of a researcher's work assessment and evaluation (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

A researcher can improve the validity and reliability of the data acquired by using a variety of ways to gather real information. In this study, the researcher intended for the data obtained in the second phase of the study from a different sample set to corroborate and strengthen the findings gathered from the qualitative data obtained from participants in the first phase of the study.

3.3 Materials/Instrumentation of Research Tools

Choosing the tools that will be utilized to gather data is an important phase in the research process. Prioritization during this stage must be placed on the validity and dependability of the data collected and, more importantly, on their possible comparison with data from earlier studies. The instruments selected by the researcher to be used for capturing the qualitative type of data in the first stage of the data collection process included semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews ranging from 30 minutes to one hour conducted with key participants among the stakeholder groups. These comprised many open-ended questions specifically designed for the various stakeholders. By contrast, the questionnaires, which was employed in the second stage of the study for the collection of quantitative data was used primarily for the STEP interns as well as other young people who are unemployed and not recruited by STEP.

These instruments comprised a maximum of 18 questions, most of which were closed-ended, depicting multiple-choice and linear scale types.

The entire procedure incorporated surveys in the form of interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires with personnel from key stakeholder groups under investigation. The primary stakeholders comprised STEP interns, government officials, employer agents and the youth, while the secondary stakeholders comprised all other non-administrative associations and the general populace.

The instruments used for capturing the data included:

- i. *Interviews* (face to face): Semi-structured interviews ranging from 30 minutes to one hour was conducted with key participants among the stakeholder groups including the Director of Youth and other youth officers, officials of the STEP from the Prime Minister's office, officials of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Government Ministers with responsibility for Youth in the Ministry of Youth Affairs.
- ii. *Focus Groups*: These groups were designed and planned to ensure the highest caliber of conversation. There is no 'optimal' answer for group composition, and group mix will continue to have an impact on the data, depending on factors like the mix of ages, sexes, and social or professional levels of the participants. A focus group should have six to eight individuals at the most.
- iii. *Questionnaire*: A prepared list of 15-20 questions was administered online to an approximate total of 150 participants among stakeholder groups in St Kitts and Nevis. This instrument was primarily structured and utilized to extract quantitative data from participants.

3.3.1 *Validity and Reliability of Instruments*

Despite the qualitative and quantitative philosophy, a third strategy employed for this study is known as the mixed strategies assessment or triangulation. With triangulation, the researcher allows the features' separating confirmation of a situation even more accurately by progressing toward it from various essential convictions utilizing various strategies and structures (Morse, 1991). This cutting edge, joint methodology of the qualitative and quantitative procedure gives the analyst an extra alternative to utilize these methodologies sequentially or at the same time inside a single exploration study. According to Bazeley and Kemp (2012), triangulation can be used for validation, which happens when the results of a study combine, or merge, leading to deeper understandings and more detailed perspectives of the subject matter.

Similarly, Wood et al. (2006) defined reliability as the instrument's capacity to consistently and accurately measure the concept under research in a consistent and accurate manner, and validity as the instrument's potential to measure what it is intended to measure. Regarding these two ideas, it is significant to highlight that the validity and dependability would have previously been established and are anticipated to be of a high degree and quality for the established instruments that were utilized and not modified in any manner.

Validity in research can be described as the amount by which a specific test or an instrument measure what it purports or claims to measure. As a result, it is critical that this test be legitimate for the results to be correctly interpreted and implemented (Golafshani, 2003). External validity and internal validity are the two primary forms of validity. External validity, according to Calder et al (1982), relates to the extent to which a study's findings may be extended to other external elements such as time, environment, and circumstances. In this case, how would the findings in relation to youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis be applied and measured over time among similar social safety net programs within similar economies?

On the other hand, internal validity, according to Onwuegbuzie (2000), is concerned with any factors such as bias that may interfere with and induce causation among test variables. When evaluating internal validity, four forms of validity are considered: face validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, and concept validity. Face validity refers to whether a procedure seems to be capable of measuring the variable it claims to. Concurrent validity examines whether the results of a new measuring technique and those of an older approach that purports to measure the same variable are linked. When the findings of a construct's assessment can be used to properly anticipate behavior, this is known as predictive validity. Construct validity is whether the measurements of a variable in a study behave in the same manner as the variable itself. This type of validity is characterized by the degree of relevance in relation to the study's results (Bagozzi et al, 1991). In this study, the researcher examined all aspects of the internal and external validity of instruments utilized.

If a study's findings aren't regarded legitimate, the study's findings are useless. The data cannot be utilized to answer the research question, which is the study's fundamental goal; if it does not measure what we want it to assess. Such findings cannot be utilized to generalize anything, and therefore it will be a waste of time and effort. It is also crucial to keep in mind that just because research is valid in one situation does not guarantee that it will be valid in another.

An important and fundamental aspect of social science research is the utilization of measurement instruments to observe human behavior. As such, any instrument's ability to consistently measure the concept being examined is one of its key characteristics. Reliability addresses the overall consistency of a research study's measurement instrument. Reliability was cited by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) as a fundamental issue when using a psychological test to examine a characteristic or behavior. Reliability, then, is the degree to which measurements

may be repeated, by different persons, under different circumstances; yet consistently provide the same results. According to Bollen (1989), reliability is the consistency of measurement.

Although the definitions and purposes of reliability and validity are distinct, it is crucial to highlight that they serve a complementary role in research. Measurement cannot be valid unless it is also trustworthy; it must be both valid and reliable if it is to be used to represent a research topic accurately. Authors Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) highlighted that the difficulties surrounding the validity and reliability of measuring instruments are the same across diverse sorts and forms of research using a comparative comparison of health care and social science research. What is of fundamental importance, however, is the researcher's ability to test these abstract concepts known as theoretical constructs to ensure that the instruments used are indeed valid and reliable, which is an essential and crucial component of research quality.

Interviews and focus groups continue to be the most often used methods for collecting data in qualitative research. These techniques are increasingly used in fields like dentistry, specifically because they provide knowledge of areas that are not accessible to quantitative techniques and/or where depth, insight, and understanding of phenomena are required, as in the situation of unemployed young people.

Semi-structured Interviews

Finding information about people's viewpoints, experiences, opinions, and/or motivations on subjects is the aim of a research interview. In comparison to solely quantitative instruments like questionnaires, interviews and other qualitative methods are regarded to provide a "deeper" understanding of social issues (Silverman, 2000). As such, when little is known about the research topic or when specific participant insights are required, interviews are most suited. Additionally, they work well for exploring sensitive topics when participants would be reluctant to bring up such issues in a group context.

For this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews as they are known for relatively high validity. A few of the prepared queries from the structured interview were combined with the freedom to pursue an unstructured format in the semi-structured interview method. A hybrid interview, combination interview, or moderately structured interview are other names for this type of interview. The researcher's decision to use this type of interview was based on the following advantages. Firstly, there is significant flexibility to pursue new topics as the need arises. Secondly, interviewers who use this style are allowed to compare candidates on the same set of questions. Finally, they offer the capacity to be measured in the same way as a structured interview.

A sequence of key questions is included in semi-structured interviews to assist in framing the subjects to be covered, but they also give the interviewer or respondent enough room to veer off topic to delve deeper into a notion or response (Britten, 1999). As it gives interviewees some guidance on what to talk about, which many people find appealing, this interview technique is most frequently employed in the healthcare industry. The flexibility of this approach, especially in comparison to planned interviews, makes it possible to find or create information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought to be pertinent by the research team. In other words, an added feature of this type of interview gives the researcher the option to ask additional questions for clarification.

Purposeful asking and probing replies with further follow-up inquiries, such as 'Can you tell me a little more about that?' are also used to establish such conclusions. Respondents will be educated about the research specifics and provided with assurances regarding ethical standards such as anonymity and confidentiality prior to conducting an interview. This provides respondents with a sense of what is expected from the interview. It also enhances the chance of honesty and is a key part of the informed consent process.

Semi-structured interviews are usually praised for their ability to stimulate insightful discussion, flexibility, and creativity, which promotes the growth of original ideas. The points of view are also presented in their genuine, unmodified natural forms, such as nonverbal communication. Interviewers might mix and match different themes to promote adaptability. A researcher has the advantage of discussing a range of topics with various themes in semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview's participative framework lets the interviewee speak freely.

According to previous studies, the development of flexible coding for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis can likewise produce accurate analysis from huge interview sample sets when applied to well-coded topics (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The semi-structured interviews are helpful for conducting in-depth dialogues. Most of the time, an investigator can thoroughly investigate the participant's conversations and various, first cursory reactions to arrive at deeper conclusions. Most of the time, a researcher can analyze every verbal and non-verbal cue, such as laughter, silence and hunches, to find information that may be useful in the final data analysis of the multiple themes learned from the interview (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The interview that is partially structured also captures data about the subjects in their most unprocessed state. When both the interviewer and the interviewee are actively participating, a well-presented semi-structured interview can best uncover the interviewee's inner voice. Semi-structured interviews are the best of both worlds of structured and unstructured interviews but do offer some unique challenges. Notwithstanding, their lack of objectivity leaves them open to examination and claims of discrimination and is considered one of the key drawbacks of this method.

Focus Groups

Notwithstanding the benefits of individual interviews, the researcher believed that focus groups can be an additional instrument to contribute positively to the qualitative nature of this study. One of the best and most popular research techniques for gathering qualitative information about consumer attitudes and perceptions is focus groups. Focus groups are used to collect information about common viewpoints and the meanings that underpin them. They also aid in gaining a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Such groups can be described as loosely organized, unstructured customer interviews with approximately eight to twelve participants.

In many ways, focus groups are like less formal interviews, but they go beyond merely gathering the same data from many people at once. A structured debate about a particular issue in a group setting is known as a focus group (Morgan, 1998). A researcher, sometimes known as a moderator or facilitator, guides, monitors, and records the conversation (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1998). Focus group research techniques are a great way to learn more about the attitudes and opinions of customers toward using a company's goods or services; in this case it would be the attitudes and opinions of the interns and other beneficiaries toward the STEP program implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis.

A focus group is a form of qualitative research. Focus groups' qualitative nature enables researchers to go beyond the facts and figures that can be gained through survey methods; in order that they might discover or confirm the significance of the data. According to Krueger (1994), for a long time focus groups have been used in marketing, urban planning, and other social sciences. These groups have become increasingly popular in health care, especially in the realm of needs assessment. The focus group format has also found favor with those doing pilot testing for curricula, program improvement, organizational development, and outcome evaluation.

There are several benefits to focus groups. Conducting qualitative research has various benefits, including the ability to ask questions in a variety of ways and the stimulation of fresh ideas and stronger viewpoints. Respondents could share their current theories in group conversations as well as offer input on any fresh information brought up by group members. Focus groups have the enormous benefit of revealing profound insights and providing rich qualitative data, which is one of their most significant benefits. They allow academics to explore complex subjects, feelings, and experiences that can be difficult to record using other methods, like surveys. Participants are given the freedom to verbalize what they are thinking and feeling, and share ideas from their own perspective, which helps researchers and decision-makers obtain a thorough understanding of the subject by receiving rich and extensive information.

The sharing of ideas among participants, which produces fresh insights, is another essential benefit of focus groups. Participants can produce a synergistic impact through the exchange of ideas and personal experiences, which can result in a deeper comprehension and wider-ranging insights. Focus groups also give researchers the chance to examine how people interact with one another and how they either validate or challenge one another's viewpoints, which can reveal important details about the standards, principles, and beliefs that influence people's thoughts.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire method of data collecting is sending respondents a list of questions (referred to as a questionnaire) by mail or email. To entice the respondents to complete and return the questionnaire on time, a written explanation of the study's goals and objectives is also given. Questionnaires are any text-based instrument that asks survey participants to reply to a series of questions or assertions by expressing a response – for example, by marking a page, writing a number, or checking a box on paper or online.

The questionnaire is the main data collection tool used in survey research. In short, it consists of a set of uniform questions, also known as items, that are organized in accordance with a predetermined structure and are used to gather individual data on one or more predetermined themes. Interviews and questionnaires may be equally mistaken, one for the other. In actuality, the questionnaire involves a certain style of interview—a formal conversation in which the wording and sequencing of the questions serve as a guide. The questionnaire is typically given to survey participants uniformly, or in a standardized style. The reasoning for standardizing questions and responses is that a stimulus can only be delivered if it is the same for all survey respondents.

Like interviews, there are basically two kinds of questionnaires- structured and unstructured. A mixture of both is the quasi-structured questionnaire that is used mostly in social science research. Pre-coded questions with well-defined skipping patterns are included in structured questionnaires to maintain the order of the questions. Emanating from the first phase of the study, the questionnaire was originally and specifically designed by the researcher to gather quantitative data based on responses retrieved and data collected from participants during the interview and focus group sessions.

Since they provide a quick, effective, and affordable opportunity to acquire large amounts of data from huge sample sizes, questionnaires are a common approach to research. These instruments work particularly well for gauging the attitudes, preferences, intentions, and behavior of the subjects. Due to their use of both open-ended and closed-ended research questions, researchers can gather both qualitative and quantitative data, which results in more detailed findings. Hence, for the purpose of this study, a structured questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data. However, two specific types of questionnaires were constructed to cater for the interns bonded by the program as well as the unemployed youth who are not beneficiaries of the STEP.

The purpose of using both types of questionnaires is for the researcher to capture data from young people affected by their involvement in the program as well as those affected by their non-involvement or absence from the program.

3.4 Operational Definition of Variables

The analysis of this mixed-methods study was based both on qualitative and quantitative data. Firstly, the researcher analyzed qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus study groups to comprehend how various aspects of the STEP program may or may not have contributed to the level of unemployed youth in St Kitts and Nevis. The findings were then tested through a correlation based on quantitative data derived from questionnaires on a representative sample of STEP interns and unemployed youth between the ages of 18 – 35.

Thematic analysis, according to Boyatzis (1998), is a technique for locating, examining, and presenting themes or patterns in the data. It thoroughly arranges and summarizes the data set, and frequently goes farther to interpret different facets of the research issue. Emanating from the transcripts of the qualitative data, the results were mainly captured in the answers to interview questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. As such, five primary constructs were identified in this category of the data and are highlighted below.

Firstly, there was the first construct: the “**perspective**” of the stakeholders involved in the partnership, which addressed the views held by the Government, STEP interns and employer agents with respect to the STEP program. The perspective of the stakeholders should be a positive one towards the success of the program where all stakeholders are required to fulfil their role and obligation to the arrangement. This construct was measured by the behavioral attitude of the interns, government officials and employer agents as well as the type or quality of the management structure of the program. The qualitative research questions linked to this construct are IQ7 and IQ8 (*see Appendix 15*).

Secondly, the “**skills**” acquired resulting from the STEP program was identified as the second construct and was measured by the type of skills achieved (hairstylist, landscaper etc), the level of skills attained (unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled, professional) and the relevance of such skills to current job positions. The type and level of skills taught or acquired by interns would determine the success of the program based on its objectives. Similarly, the relevance of skills achieved, with respect to available jobs in the labor market, was assessed by this indicator. The qualitative research question linked to this construct is IQ3 (*see Appendix 15*).

The third construct was “**training**” provided for interns and obtained because of the STEP program. This was measured by the frequency of training (how often interns have been trained) and the quality of training (certification). Evidence from the manuscript points to the fact that the success of this component of the program was dependent on the acquirement of a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) as opposed to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) which is considered quite limited and restricted only for the country of St Kitts and Nevis. The qualitative research question linked to this construct is IQ3 (*see Appendix 15*).

Fourthly, the “**empowerment**” aspect of the STEP program was measured by the number of permanent employment positions acquired for interns and the number of entrepreneurs with established businesses resulting from the program. In this regard, the number of permanent jobs created, along with established entrepreneurs determined the level of success. The qualitative research questions linked to this construct are IQ6 and IQ9 (*see Appendix 15*).

Lastly, the “**impact**” construct examined the dependent variable of youth unemployment to determine the level of effect on this variable because of the STEP program. The researcher used the number of persons employed by STEP; the number of trainees who successfully graduated from the program; and the number of permanent jobs attained as

indicators to determine the extent of the impact. The qualitative research questions linked to this construct are IQ4 and IQ5 (*see Appendix 15*).

The study design is one of association and correlation where two variables are linear related and move in relation to one another. The two main variables identified are the STEP program (independent) and the youth unemployment rate (dependent). However, there are several factors or attributes of the STEP program that were used to measure the impact of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis. In this study, the predictor which is also referred to as the independent variable has been identified as the STEP program while the criterion, known as the dependent variable, has been identified as youth unemployment. The types (nature) of variables used in the study comprised ordinal, dichotomous and multinominal. However, the measurement of both variables was ordinal.

From the quantitative aspect of the study, the conceptual definition of the construct **“impact”** was explored in detail, with the use of several indicators of measurement. With the STEP program as the independent variable, the researcher first assessed the impact on the labor market, and this was measured by the prevailing market conditions and the number of jobs attained. From these indicators, the researcher then measured the impact of STEP on the labor market in St Kitts and Nevis prior to (2015) and during STEP (2017 to 2020).

Secondly, with respect to the impact on the economy of St Kitts and Nevis, the researcher utilized several indicators to measure this impact. These included the government’s assistance to private sector businesses, wage payment to interns and employment opportunities provided for its citizens because of STEP. As such, the number of private businesses assisted by wage labor bill; the wages paid in the STEP program in comparison to market wages and the number of persons employed by STEP was taken into consideration to assess and measure the impact.

Thirdly, as it relates to the dependent variable of youth unemployment, the researcher examined the rate of youth unemployment for the age group 18 – 35 and divided this by the total number of people in the labor force in St Kitts and Nevis to determine the percentage of interns integrated into the labor force as a result of STEP; thus contributing to the GDP and by extension, the economy.

3.5 Study Procedures and Ethical Assurances

Prior to the process of data collection, the researcher ensured that the required approval was granted from the Board of UNICAF Research Ethics Committee (UREC) as outlined in the guidelines pertaining to the study. While awaiting approval from UREC, primary stakeholder institutions, such as the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, were officially contacted in writing seeking permission from their respective offices to engage employees of their institution as participants in the study.

Approval was then received in writing from the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis (Office of the Prime Minister) and the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) to conduct personal interviews with Ministers of Government and other officials from the Statistical Department, Youth Department and Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP), as well as economists from the ECCB. This resulted in Gatekeeper letters that were prepared and submitted to the University on behalf of these institutions.

Following the Committee's approval, a random list of STEP interns with contact details from across St Kitts and Nevis was obtained from the office of the STEP. Additionally, the names of STEP officials who worked directly with the program were also sought from the Director of STEP. The names of economists at the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and other government officials responsible for the member country of St Kitts and Nevis were also identified and contacted.

Similarly, the Directors of the National Youth Departments in St Kitts and Nevis were contacted to recommend the relevant youth officers from their departments to participate in the study. Once the names and contact information was compiled, all participants were officially contacted in writing via email or WhatsApp and followed up with a telephone call to confirm receipt of information and willingness/consent to participate. Appointments were then scheduled accordingly over a 3–4 week period. The interviews lasted approximately 30 – 40 minutes, were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. These data allowed the researcher to discover the meanings that young people give to their situation of unemployment as well as the role played by the providers of social safety net programs.

Following the completion of the interviews and focus group discussions during the period of data collection for the first phase of the study, the researcher compiled all the data (transcripts and recordings) to begin the analysis. This process lasted approximately two to three weeks. Prior to this, however, the data was reviewed and checked for inconsistencies, a process known as cleaning; after which it was inputted into Taguette where it was coded, assessed and analyzed according to several broad themes.

In keeping with the exploratory sequential mixed methods design approach adopted by the researcher for this study, having obtained and analyzed the data for the first phase of the study, the researcher prepared the instrument for the second phase, which was identified as a questionnaire. However, as there were two different types of respondents targeted (STEP interns and unemployed youth), two slightly different types of questionnaires were designed and prepared with the assistance of Google Forms. The researcher thought it was fitting to utilize Google Forms based on the many advantages. In addition to the fact that it is a free online tool for conducting surveys, it is also very useful for summarizing charts and graphs immediately and viewing or exporting the data gathered into an excel spreadsheet for analysis.

As the researcher's intention was to use this instrument to collect quantitative data, most questions were close ended, characterized by multiple choice and Likert scale type. These forms were then distributed via the Google Forms online platform and retrieved over a period of two weeks. The data from the questionnaires were subsequently checked for any inconsistencies, exported into Excel and inputted into SPSS for analysis to conclude the second phase of the study.

When an individual or organization has the chance to act by doing for their own advantage, ethics is frequently characterized as an underlying principle that would lead to a decision to take action to avert significant harm to others (Boddy, 2011). Our impression that it can seriously harm or greatly benefit another is the foundation of the idea of an individual's moral standard (Churchill, 1982). The creation of a strategy plan includes consideration of ethics since it is crucial for businesses to uphold the public's trust to continue receiving support from clients, partners, and other stakeholders. Customers, employees, the government, and the media are among the important parties involved in the operations of a company from a business perspective (Carlson et al., 2011). These groups reflect those who may profit or suffer because of commercial firms' decisions (Churchill, 1982; Boddy, 2011).

Many factors make it essential to uphold ethical standards when doing research. First, standards improve the goals of research, such as knowledge, accuracy, and error avoidance. For instance, rules that prohibit fabricating, distorting, or falsely presenting study data promote accuracy and decrease truth. Second, ethical standards promote the virtues that are essential to collaborative work, such as fairness, accountability, respect for others, and trust, as research typically involves a great deal of cooperation and coordination between several individuals in diverse organizations and fields. Third, several ethical guidelines enable the public to hold researchers responsible. Government rules on research misconduct, conflicts of interest, the protection of human subjects, and animal care and usage, for instance, are necessary to

ensure that researchers who are paid with public monies may be held accountable to the public. Fourth, raising public support for research also benefits from ethical norms in the field. People are more likely to fund research if they believe in its quality and integrity. Finally, a variety of other fundamental moral and social values, such as civic responsibility, respect for others, human rights, animal welfare, legal compliance, and public health and safety, are supported by numerous research standards. Unethical study techniques can have major repercussions for researchers, students, and the public.

One of the fundamental responsibilities of researchers is to ensure that owing to participants' engagement and involvement in the research process, they are met with no harm. Stakeholders are the people or organizations that directly profit from or are negatively influenced by a company's operations and actions. While ethics cannot make humans flawless in an empirical reality, according to a study by Perlman and Hughes (2008), it can stop or lessen the amount of harm that is done. Perlman and Hughes (2008) claim that when an individual or organization has the chance to do so, ethics takes action to stop significant harm to others.

Some of the ethical implications in the gathering and collection of data for this research assignment can arise in the areas of coercion and deception, confidentiality and trust, and informed consent. To protect the participants in this study, the researcher ensured that permission was first granted to conduct the research through a consent form that was signed by participants, and that collected data were secured and kept confidential and anonymous under password protection. Assuring participants of their confidentiality encourages participants to be honest when responding to survey questions (Stephens, 2007). If steps are not taken to practice good ethical standards, this can result in harm brought to the participants as well as the researcher.

Confidentiality in research refers to the methods employed by the researcher regarding the data collected. It is the researcher's responsibility to protect the privacy of the research participants and the information disseminated by ensuring that the data is anonymized and separated from the identifying details of participants. Thus, when the researcher presents a research project to a review board for consideration, the committee places an obligation on the researcher to protect the rights of the participants, including their right to privacy. One of the committee's standard requirements is for the researcher to protect the identity of the subject by providing anonymity, and not disclose any information obtained by providing confidentiality.

To comply, researchers must employ certain strategies. One way in which the researcher in this study has sought to do this is to reduce the risk of identification by grouping participants together as in the case of focus groups and describing them in ranges of characteristic, such as a territory (St Kitts versus Nevis). Additionally, the use of codes and pseudonyms are some of the strategies that were employed by the researcher in storing, retrieving and disposing of the data during the research period. For example, letters and numbers representing codes were used to identify responses from individuals instead of actual names.

When the intention of an investigation is to generalize from a sample to a larger group, some type of probability sampling is required to ensure that such generalizations are robust. It would be hard to be assured that the sample was not selected in a biased manner and that the selection rule was not related to the variables utilized in the study, without the unpredictability that probability sampling entails. For this reason, to prevent bias, the researcher in this study employed random sampling to ensure a true and proper representation of the sample population. Additionally, during the process of conducting the interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher was sure to remain neutral, without influence on the interviewees and their responses.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

3.6.1 Data Collection Tools

Data collection is a significant part of an exploration study. There are several information assortment devices that researchers may use to acquire information. With the mixed methodologies way, experts combine strategies for social event or look at information from the quantitative and qualitative framework of a particular investigative research (Creswell; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). In that capacity, researchers gather and investigate numerical data as well as story data to address the exploration question(s).

Hence, two of the most fitting devices identified for this specific examination were the interview and the questionnaire. The interview is one such instrument that permits the researcher to test further, asking follow-up enquiries to get more data. Reviews were in the form of electronic and paper polls including open-ended and close-ended questions. To gather a blend of information, the researcher conducted a series of interviews utilizing open-ended questions to gather subjective information. Once the qualitative data was collected, the researcher created a specific questionnaire of primarily close-ended questions to gather quantitative information to inform the qualitative aspect of the study.

The research study utilized online and hand-conveyed poll overviews as well as telephone, video conference and face to face meetings to gather essential information from people and institutions among the stakeholder groups identified. After gaining verbal authorization, a duplicate of the poll review was circulated and gathered inside a 2 to 3-week time frame. Interviews were arranged to occur during an ensuing 3-week time span.

From a qualitative outlook, the personal interviews were utilized to find out realities, assessments and presumptions identifying with the basic reasons for this youth unemployment issue and suggestions for remedial action. The information was examined to discover various themes and ideas identifying with the research questions, as well as contrasts or likenesses among the equivalent.

From a quantitative viewpoint, both essential and auxiliary measurable information was accumulated and broken-down utilizing Excel and SPSS, a factual device for evaluating reviews and discovering relations. As a feature of the investigation, examinations were made of elevated levels of youth unemployment over a particular timeframe (approximately 3 - 5 years), prior to and post-STEP implementation. Notwithstanding SPSS, the researcher also embraced "Pearson Correlation" to test the connection between the levels of youth unemployment and the components related with this phenomenon as recognized by the respondents. Another test that was used by the researcher was the Chi-square test that includes straight out data.

There are two types of Pearson's chi-square tests: The chi-square goodness of fit test is used to test whether the frequency distribution of a categorical variable is different from the researcher's expectations. The chi-square test of independence is used to test whether two categorical variables are related to each other. One sort of this test analyses the recurrence of what is normal in principle against what is watched while the subsequent kind includes a two-variable test for autonomy. The after-effects of the investigation were given featuring the use of tables, figures, bar charts and information.

The research approach identified and selected by the researcher for this study is an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. Exploratory research is done to learn more about a problem's nature, which in this case, is youth unemployment, and to assist the researcher in understanding it better.

The mixed methods approach is a multi-level strategy that combines both a systematic and planned approach to research as well as a two-phase approach (for example, qualitative research first, followed by quantitative research) (Creswell, 1994; Flick, 2011). A first phase of collecting and analyzing qualitative data was followed by a second phase of collecting and analyzing quantitative data, with a final phase of bringing together data from the two different strands to make up the exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The quantitative and qualitative parts of this data collection procedure could be carried out concurrently or in a different order (Creswell, Fetters, and Ivankova, 2004). The third phase will then be reached once each phase has been triangulated, where qualitative data can indicate knowledge and depth and quantitative data can offer general trends (Newby, 2014). Therefore, discoveries from qualitative data will be applied to contextualize and enrich findings (Bryman, 2007), improve data validity (Bazeley, 2002; Orgard, 2005), and create new knowledge (Stange, 2006).

3.6.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Primary data, through interviews and focus study groups was collected from participants about their reasons, viewpoints and perspectives on the issue of youth unemployment and the STEP program implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis to address this issue. This type of data provided the information needed to answer the main research question which sought to investigate the impact of the program upon youth unemployment. The researcher then analyzed the responses to identify the contexts, conditions, circumstances and consequences of youth unemployment in relation to the STEP.

Considering the resulting categories from the qualitative study as variables, the researcher employed the second step to develop a quantitative instrument in the form of a questionnaire to collect quantitative primary data from a different sample of respondents. The third step was to use the findings to interpret, assess and determine the overall prevalence of these variables for a larger sample population of unemployed youth within St Kitts and Nevis.

For this research assignment, semi-structured interviews were conducted during a four-week period to collect qualitative data. Participants were contacted in advance and appointments were set. All interviews were conducted face to face except for two interviews, which were conducted virtually via Google Meet.

From a qualitative viewpoint, the data collected from the personal semi-structured interviews in the first phase was assessed, analyzed and processed using the recommended software Taguette, to find out realities and presumptions identifying with the basic reasons for the research issue and suggestions for remedial action. The information was examined and interpreted to discover various themes and ideas identifying with the research questions, as well as contrasts or likenesses among the equivalent. According to Alexander Di Pofi (2002), qualitative examination is a methodology that investigates or explores human conduct and collaboration concerning a social issue, as in this case, youth unemployment.

As such, the accumulation of the qualitative data sets was extracted from the transcripts of taped recorded material, and the researcher was able to organize the receipt of data based on the four categories of respondents: STEP management officials; Government officials (Youth Department, Director of Statistics and Labor Commissioner of St Kitts-Nevis); research economists; and STEP interns (focus groups). With the assistance of Taguette, the transcripts were imported, then coded and categorized to formulate themes to address the research questions. The purpose of qualitative research in this study was to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses associated with it.

Main Research Question:

To what extent has STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St. Kitts - Nevis?

Hypotheses:

H1o: The implementation of STEP has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: The implementation of STEP has resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

The researcher's role was to use the thematic analysis deductive approach in analyzing the data by using the research questions (main and sub) to group the data and then find similarities and differences among it. Additionally, as time and resources were limited and the fact that this data extracted from 24 interviewees was a smaller component of a larger quantitative study of 126 participants, the researcher believed this approach was most suitable.

3.6.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

Two types of questionnaires were designed and constructed to gather quantitative data from STEP interns as well as young unemployed people not affiliated with STEP. From a quantitative outlook, primary data, gathered from these two types of questionnaires collected in the second phase was analyzed utilizing SPSS, a factual device for evaluating reviews and discovering relations. SPSS is comprehensive and compatible with almost any type of data and was used by the researcher to run descriptive statistics and generate reports, graphs, plots and trend lines based on data analyses.

Additionally, the researcher utilized central tendency to analyze the frequency of each data point in the distribution and described it using the mean, median, or mode, which measures the most common patterns of the analyzed data set. As a feature of the investigation, examinations were made of elevated levels of youth unemployment over a particular timeframe (approximately 3 - 5 years), prior to and post-STEP implementation.

As such, quantitative data was gathered from questionnaires distributed to a random sample of 150 persons selected from the national registry list from among the 14 parishes in St. Kitts and Nevis. Participants comprised STEP interns and unemployed youth. Participants were contacted via WhatsApp messaging and a follow-up call to confirm receipt of information and willingness to participate. All questionnaires were dispatched online via Google forms and participants were given a maximum of two weeks for completion. The data was then downloaded from the Google forms and imported into Excel. Steps were taken to clean the data to ensure consistency and prepare for coding.

Data was coded through a process of quantitative coding where the researcher categorized the non-numerical information from the respondents into groups and assigned numerical codes to these groups. Numeric coding is shared by all statistical software and among others, it facilitates data conversion and measurement comparisons. The simplest section or component of the raw data of information that may be evaluated in a meaningful manner in relation to the phenomena is the unit of coding, according to Boyatiz (1998).

Statistical tests used in this phase of the study included Pearson Correlation and Spearman rank correlation tests. These statistical tests were used to: (a) determine whether an association or correlation between the two main variables exists; and (b) if such an association or correlation existed, to measure the strength and direction of the association/correlation. Therefore, the researcher embraced "Pearson" and "Spearman" to test the connection between the levels of youth unemployment and the components related with this phenomenon as recognized or identified by the respondents.

In the case of this study, the question to consider: Is there a relationship between youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis and the implementation of STEP; and if this relationship existed, the researcher measured the strength and direction of the association or correlation to answer the research question and determine the impact.

The researcher also conducted the two types of Chi-square tests as both tests involved categorical data, which are present in this study. The first type of Chi-square test compared the frequency count of what is expected in theory against what was observed in the study. The second type of Chi-square test with the inclusion of the two variables earlier identified tested for independence. The results of the investigation are displayed using tables, figures, bar charts and graphs.

3.7 Summary

This chapter addressed the research methods employed by the researcher; the required instruments and procedures necessary for the collection, cleaning and coding of data; the sample population and design and ethical procedures adopted in the research assignment. The tactics, procedures, or techniques used to gather data or evidence for analysis to find out more about a topic or understand it better are known as research methods. Different research approaches use different tools to collect data.

As indicated earlier, the research approach identified for this study is the sequential exploratory mixed methods that assessed both qualitative and quantitative data. Combining research methods from the quantitative and qualitative fields is known as using mixed methodologies. There is a lot of potential intricacy in the combination of these tactics. However, more academics are embracing the concept of mixed approaches, and there is more published research now than there was previously. How to conduct and use mixed methods research has received a lot of attention recently (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

In St Kitts and Nevis, the age category that determines youth is from 18 to 35; hence a vast majority of the research participants comprised that age range. As such, data was obtained from a population sample of 150 comprising STEP interns and officials, government officials, economists, youth workers and unemployed youth. From this study, the required instruments

of research to gather qualitative data was in the form of focus groups and semi- structured interviews. These instruments of research were carefully chosen by the researcher as the best research tools for this kind of investigation.

Focus groups, for instance, are used to collect information about common viewpoints and the meanings that underpin them. Additionally, they assist in acquiring an in-depth comprehension of the participants' experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 1998). Additionally, it is the assumption that qualitative methods—like interviews—provide a "deeper" understanding of social issues than purely quantitative ones—like questionnaires. Therefore, when information about a research subject is scarce or when specific participant insights are required, interviews are most suited (Silverman, 2000).

From this qualitative perspective, information from personal interviews and stories were uploaded into the recommended software Taguette and was used by the researcher to determine realities and presumptions associated with the basic reasons for this phenomenon of youth unemployment from a sample of persons directly involved in the program. From the quantitative aspect, two types of questionnaires were designed as the primary instrument to extract data from another sample of STEP interns as well as unemployed youth. According to Brown (2001), the questionnaire is the primary tool for gathering data in survey research. The questionnaires were designed and constructed based on the analysis emanating from the qualitative data in the first phase of the study. Most of the questions were close ended in keeping with the quantitative data to be expected in this second phase of the study. Following a process of cleaning the data for inconsistencies and coding the data in quantitative form, measurable information was accumulated and further analyzed utilizing SPSS.

With regards to sampling procedures, the researcher employed purposive sampling for the collection of qualitative data where a critical case sampling technique was used. Patton (1990), supports the concept of purposive sampling where a wide number of techniques

are used in relation to this type of sampling; one such being critical case sampling. In exploratory qualitative research, research with constrained resources, and research where a small number of cases can be crucial in explaining the phenomenon of interest, critical case sampling is a type of purposive sampling strategy that is especially useful.

On the other hand, a stratified random sampling method was adopted for the sequential phase of quantitative data collection where a different sample set was employed based on the gender and age range of the participants involved in the study. A researcher can divide the entire population into several non-overlapping, uniformly distributed groups (strata) and arbitrarily choose study participants from various categories using the probability method known as stratified random sampling, which decreases expenses and increases productivity. Members of each group should differ from one another to guarantee that every group member has an equal chance of getting selected using fundamental probability. In this study, this was done to eliminate the possibility of sampling bias and to ensure reliability and validity of the research study.

With regards to the ethical processes and procedures, the researcher ensured compliance with all ethical standards and requirements outlined by the University for the completion of this study. As such, steps were taken to obtain the necessary authorization, approvals and consent from all institutions and participants in the study. As it relates to anonymity and confidentiality, according to Stephens (2007), participants are more likely to be truthful while answering to survey questions when they are assured of their secrecy.

Additionally, confidentiality of the data obtained was maintained throughout the research work. From a business viewpoint, stakeholders are referred to as customers, employees, the government, and the media, who are among the major parties involved in the firm's activities (Carlson et al., 2011). In the same way, the stakeholders involved in this research assignment were observed likewise. Hence, the researcher was able to establish a sound, ethical

background as the basis for this study, knowing that if good ethical practices were not followed, both the participants and the researcher may suffer negative effects.

While the analysis of this mixed-methods study is based on qualitative and quantitative data, the study design has been identified by the researcher as one of association and correlation where two variables are linear related and move in relation to one another. The two main variables identified are the STEP program (independent) and youth unemployment rate (dependent). Primary constructs associated with the STEP program were identified, highlighted and measured against the concept of youth unemployment, based on the objectives of the research question(s). During the analysis, the researcher embraced "Pearson" and "Spearman" to test the connection between the levels of youth unemployment and the components related with this phenomenon as recognized or identified by the respondents; and to determine what kind of relationship existed between youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis and the implementation of STEP.

A sort of correlation coefficient known as the Pearson coefficient shows the association between two separate variables measured on the same interval or ratio scale. The strength of the link between two continuous variables is gauged by the Pearson coefficient. Because it is based on the method of covariance, it is regarded as the best method for determining the relationship between variables of interest. It provides details on the size of the association or correlation as well as the relationship's slant. Likewise, the degree of correlation between two qualitative variables can also be determined using the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient. The given data must be ordered in the form of "ranks" which can be used to calculate the extent of the correlation between the two variables.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter begins with an overview of the goals and objectives of the research study followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and hypotheses. The overall objective of this mixed-methods research study was to investigate and analyze the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP); and to critically examine this safety net public policy program to determine whether its implementation by the government has had any direct effects on the reduction of youth unemployment in the St. Kitts and Nevis's economy. The assessment of the program's effectiveness was examined based on the following objectives: to determine the most significant features of the STEP that attributed to its success; to determine to what extent young interns of STEP have increased their chances for employment compared to those who have not participated in the program; to examine the activities of the program to determine economic impact and to discover opportunities and suggestions for a better policy design. Hence, the findings of the study were assessed according to the five research questions outlined hereunder and the hypotheses linked to each one.

Main Research Question (RQ1) and Hypothesis:

To what extent has STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?

H1o: The implementation of STEP has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: The implementation of STEP has resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

Research Sub-questions and Hypotheses

RQ2: What are the most significant features of the STEP?

H1o: There are no significant features of STEP.

H1a: There are significant features of STEP.

RQ3: To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

H1o: It is difficult for people trained by STEP to obtain employment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: It is easy for STEP trainees to obtain employment in St Kitts and Nevis.

RQ4: What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?

H1o: The activities of STEP have not resulted in any economic impact for St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: The activities of STEP have resulted in an economic impact for St Kitts and Nevis.

RQ5: What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP program? H1o:

There are no opportunities to improve the current design of the STEP program in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: There are opportunities available to improve the current design of STEP in St Kitts and Nevis.

The primary result of the study is essentially its findings. It is essentially crucial knowledge that can be learned through research. The results of the study are facts and phrases, observations, and experimental data. In this context, it is crucial to keep in mind that "findings" does not always equate to "factual information," as conductive research depends more on conclusions and implications than on quantifiable facts. Since it is the area of a research paper or dissertation that will assist the researcher in gaining a thorough understanding of the study difficulties, the findings section of a research paper is of utmost importance. It is in this section where the researcher can approve or reject theories. The findings section also aids the researcher in illustrating the importance of the issue being investigated. The researcher can

quickly address the correlational research between the many types of study variables through examination of the findings section.

Throughout the discussion of the research findings, the researcher begins with an outline of the trustworthiness of the data collected to address triangulation and confirmability evident in the study. The rigor or trustworthiness of a study is defined as the level of assurance in the data, interpretation, and methodologies used to ensure the quality of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Readers should consider this area when reading a research report since reliability or rigor is essential to the readers' confidence in the conclusions of any study. With the purpose of corroboration and validation, the researcher's aim was to triangulate both approaches by directly comparing the qualitative findings with the quantitative statistical results to arrive at a conclusion. Two datasets were acquired for the research, each of which was given a distinct analysis and comparison.

This first section is then followed by a discussion on the reliability and validity of the data. How accurately a method assesses something is referred to as both validity and reliability. In other words, a measure's consistency, or if the outcomes can be replicated under the same circumstances, determines how reliable it is. The term for a measure's accuracy, or if the results reflect what they are designed to measure, is known as validity. Both are crucial in determining if a research project is suitable, meaningful, and beneficial.

The third section deals with the results of the findings. Here, the researcher first portrays the qualitative aspect of the study followed by the quantitative. The results for the first phase of the study were based on the five major themes. These themes were identified as *perspective*, *skills*, *training*, *empowerment* and *impact*; and assessed according to the research question or questions linked to each theme. Subsequently, the findings generated from the second phase of the study characterized by quantitative data were tested using the same research questions to ascertain likenesses or differences pertaining to the effects of youth unemployment against this public policy program.

The fourth section seeks to evaluate the research findings to answer the research questions.

Finally, the researcher ends with a summary of the chapter.

4.1 Trustworthiness of Data

According to Polit & Beck, (2014), the degree of reliability or integrity of a study is determined by the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and processes utilized to ensure the caliber of the research. To ensure that readers are aware of the protocols and techniques needed for each study, researchers should specify them (Amankwaa, 2016). Although many professionals think that trustworthiness is important, there are divergent views in the research regarding what makes someone trustworthy (Leung, 2015). The principles described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including reliability, transferability, authenticity, dependability and trustworthiness, are nevertheless adhered to by many qualitative researchers. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The most crucial factor is the study's credibility, or trust in the validity of the conclusions (Polit & Beck, 2014). Internal validity in quantitative research is similar to this idea. Credibility is built through ongoing communication with participants, ongoing observation when pertinent to the study, peer-debriefing, member-checking, and reflective journaling, among other techniques. Additionally, there should be evidence that the data was thoroughly examined and questioned. It is crucial to consider competing theories or adverse case studies as well.

Dependability is the consistency of the data over time and in many research contexts (Polit and Beck, 2014). It is comparable to dependability in quantitative research, but with the understanding that how stable the settings are will depend on the sort of investigation. Studies of conditions that patients experience can occasionally be quite comparable. Nevertheless, conditions will alter in the research of a program implemented in a hospital.

Peer debriefings with a coworker and maintaining an audit trail of process logs are procedures for reliability. Process logs serve as the researcher's record of every activity taken over the course of the study and every decision made regarding the numerous components of it, such as who to interview and what to observe.

The degree to which results can be independently verified is known as confirmability. This has to do with how objective quantitative research is (Polit & Beck, 2014). Methods entail keeping records of a methodological log memo and an analytical audit trail. Qualitative researchers scrupulously record their choices and the development of their analyses. In contrast to other areas of research, the nature of transferability, or the amount to which discoveries are beneficial to people in other settings, involves readers deciding how applicable the findings are to their circumstances (Polit & Beck, 2014). Qualitative researchers carefully analyze the informants' narratives without claiming that this is the case for all people. Researchers contribute to improving the study's transferability by providing a full, in-depth assessment of the situation, surroundings, and participants as well as by being open and honest about the analysis and dependability. For readers to be both informed and moved, researchers must present a concise picture (Amankwaa, 2016).

Authenticity, according to Polit and Beck (2014), is the degree to which researchers accurately and totally depict a variety of realities and authentically portray the lives of participants. The researchers satisfy this requirement by carefully selecting suitable study subjects and by offering a thorough, in-depth description. This section demonstrates the advantage of qualitative research in that it can fully portray the complex meaning of an occurrence to better understand readers. Quantitative research lacks an analogy to authenticity.

According to Creswell (1994) and Flick (2011), the researcher's systematic and planned technique in this study was based on a multi-level strategy that included a two-phase approach,

where qualitative research was initially gathered and analyzed before being followed by quantitative research. Each step was then combined into a third phase, where qualitative data showed experience and depth and quantitative data offered broad trends (Newby, 2014). To boost data validity (Bazeley, 2002; Orgard, 2005), interpret and enhance findings (Bryman, 2007), and generate new knowledge (Stange, 2006), the results from qualitative data have been utilized. According to the researcher, combining the two techniques has improved comprehension of the topic of how government safety net programs affect youth unemployment (Hoover and Krishnamurti, 2010). By adding to the evidence and balancing out the disadvantages of any one technique, it has helped to increase trust in the conclusions (Bryman, 2007; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2003).

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), this type of research conducted by the researcher is defined as qualitative and quantitative data mixed inside a single study, with their strengths complementing each other. The approach to the order of data gathering for this study comprised qualitative and quantitative phases running sequentially (Creswell, Fetters and Ivankova, 2004). For this investigation, the researcher facilitated exploratory research within a sequential mixed methods design approach known as triangulation, that involved qualitative and quantitative data (Morse, 1991).

The data collected from the personal semi-structured interviews in the first phase was assessed and analyzed using Taguette. The researcher was able to extract a codebook from Taguette to reflect the number of tags highlighted under the respective themes relative to the research questions. From Table 1 below, it is evident that the majority number of highlights (53 responses), received from participants were centered on their perspective of the STEP which reflected the views and feelings of the stakeholders toward the program. Similarly, the second highest number of highlights (40 responses) focused on the overall impact, which

examined the two main variables (the STEP program and youth unemployment) and described the effect on stakeholders in relation to these variables.

Table 1: Taguette Codebook Showing Number of Tags Highlighted

Tag	Description	Number of highlights
Interesting	describes highlights of qualitative data from respondents	16
Perspective	describes the views of stakeholders towards the program	53
Skills	measures the type, level and relevance acquired by interns	15
Training	measures the frequency and quality	20
Empowerment	measures the number of permanent jobs and number of entrepreneurs established	26
Overall Impact	describes the effect on all the constructs and variables because of the program	40
Total		170

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

The qualitative (exploratory) findings from the first phase of data collection were used as a foundation to subsequently test and compare the data received in the second phase (quantitative). In general, this approach was beneficial to identify important variables (in Phase 1) for later quantitative analysis when variables are unknown or uncertain (in Phase 2), as in the case of youth unemployment (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As such, while there were two known variables identified in Phase 1 (the STEP program and youth unemployment), the researcher discovered in the subsequent part of the study that there were other possible

variables in the mix that impacted youth unemployment within St Kitts and Nevis. These were identified as the labor market, wage bill and government assistance to private sector businesses.

For this study, within the context of an exploratory sequential design approach, and to eliminate bias, the researcher selected a parallel relationship pertaining to both sample sets. A parallel relationship indicates that separate qualitative and quantitative sample members were drawn from the population in both phases of the study. Additionally, a critical case sampling technique was employed for the qualitative aspect of the study. This is a form of purposive sampling beneficial in cases where a small number of cases (as in 34 respondents) can be crucial in explaining the phenomenon of interest – youth unemployment.

For the sequential phase of data collection in relation to the quantitative data, the researcher employed a probability sampling method using a stratified sampling technique to gather data. This procedure allowed the researcher to draw more exact conclusions from the respondents by ensuring that each subgroup in the sample was properly represented. Hence, the population was divided into subgroups based on the attributes of gender (male, female) and age range (18 – 35). Again, this was done to eliminate the possibility of sampling bias.

To ensure confirmability of the data collected, interviews were recorded and replayed to ensure that the data were accurately captured and based solely on the views, opinions and perceptions of the participants in the study and not of the researcher. During the process of conducting the interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher was careful to remain neutral, without influence on the interviewees and their varied responses. The accumulation of the qualitative data sets was then extracted from the transcripts of taped recorded material, and the researcher was able to organize the data based on the four categories of respondents involved in the survey.

During the data collection, several interesting topics emerged and were repeated throughout the interviews. These included the attitudes of interns toward the program; how the program was structured and managed; how interns were recruited; as well as the benefits, objectives and outcomes of the program. There were many commonalities and several differences in opinions, based on different perspectives. Hence, to assess the impact of the program, the researcher decided that it was appropriate to use the main components of the program based on its objectives to code the responses received likewise.

It is important to note that the participants targeted for this first phase of the study were the primary stakeholders in the program. The researcher felt it was necessary to obtain first-hand data from persons who were directly involved or associated with the program. With the assistance of Taguette, the transcripts were imported, then coded and categorized to formulate broad themes to address the research questions. Of the 34 interviewees, 170 responses were coded and categorized under the six tags as highlighted in *Table 1*.

From a sample population of 150 participants across St Kitts and Nevis, qualitative data was captured from 34 semi-structured interviews classified according to four categories of respondents: STEP management officials; Government officials (Permanent Secretaries; Youth, Statistical and Labor Departments); STEP interns focus groups and research economists. Of the 34 interviews conducted, there were seven respondents of the STEP management team, nine respondents from the Government offices, three research economists from the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, and two focus groups of 15 STEP interns across St Kitts and Nevis. Based on the findings, the researcher analyzed qualitative data to identify the contexts, conditions, circumstances and consequences of youth unemployment in relation to STEP. As such, the data was categorized according to five primary constructs reflecting the five major themes as shown below:

1. *Perspective* – the views held by stakeholders in relation to the STEP
2. *Skills* – the level and importance of the skills sets acquired by STEP interns
3. *Training* – the frequency and quality of training provided to STEP interns
4. *Empowerment* – the ability of STEP interns to achieve this component of the program
5. *Impact* – the level of STEP’s contribution toward the reduction of youth unemployment

According to these five themes, the findings are displayed in the Results section of this report.

From a quantitative viewpoint, measurable information was accumulated and broken-down utilizing SPSS, a factual device for evaluating reviews and discovering relations. An assessment was made of elevated levels of youth unemployment over a particular timeframe (2013 - 2018), prior to and post-STEP implementation. Notwithstanding SPSS, the researcher also embraced "Pearson Correlation" and "Spearman" to test the connection between the levels of youth unemployment and the components related with this phenomenon as recognized by the respondents.

From the quantitative aspect of the study, the conceptual definition of the construct “**impact**” was explored in detail, with the use of several indicators of measurement. With the STEP program as the independent variable, the researcher assessed the impact on the labor market, and this was measured by the prevailing market conditions and the number of jobs attained. From these indicators, the researcher was able to measure the impact of STEP on the labor market in St Kitts and Nevis prior to (2015) and during STEP (2017 to 2020).

Secondly, with respect to the impact on the economy of St Kitts and Nevis, the researcher utilized various indicators to measure this impact. These included the government's assistance to private sector businesses, wage payment to interns and employment opportunities provided for its citizens because of STEP. As such, the number of private businesses assisted by wage labor bill; the wages paid in the STEP program in comparison to market wages and the number of persons employed by STEP were all taken into consideration to assess and measure the impact.

Thirdly, as it relates to the dependent variable of youth unemployment, the researcher assessed the youth unemployment rate for the age group 18 – 35 and divided this by the total number of people in the labor force of St Kitts and Nevis to determine the percentage of interns integrated into the labor force because of STEP; thereby contributing to the GDP and by extension, the economy.

4.2 Reliability and Validity of Data

A strategy employed by the researcher for this study was the mixed strategies assessment, also known as triangulation. According to Bazeley and Kemp (2012), triangulation can be used for validation, which happens when the results converge, or are integrated and lead to deeper understandings and more nuanced interpretations of the subject of interest. By approaching a scenario from various fundamental convictions through a variety of tactics and structures, triangulation enables the researcher to separate a situation's confirmation even more precisely from its aspects (Morse, 1991). This state-of-the-art, combined qualitative and quantitative technique offers the analyst an additional choice to apply these methodologies either sequentially or simultaneously within a single exploration study. For this research, the findings from the quantitative aspect of the study were used to augment and enhance the findings emanating from the qualitative aspect, helping to make the study rich and meaningful, while strengthening its validity.

Wood et al. (2006) defined reliability as the instrument's capacity to consistently and accurately assess the concept under research and validity as the ability of the instrument to measure what it is designed to measure. Regarding these two ideas, it is important to keep in mind that the validity and reliability would already have been proven for the existing instruments of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires that were used in this study and not modified in any manner. The amount to which an instrument or test measures what it purports or claims to measure is described as validity in research. As a result, it is critical that this test be legitimate for the results to be correctly interpreted and implemented (Golafshani, 2003). External validity and internal validity are the two primary forms of validity.

External validity, according to Calder et al (1982), refers to the extent to which a study's findings may be extended to other external elements such as time, environment, and circumstances. In this case, how would the findings in relation to youth unemployment be applied and measured over time among similar social safety net programs within similar economies? Upon the completion of this study, the researcher is of the view that the method and instruments utilized would yield the same or similar results, when tested under similar circumstances.

On the other hand, internal validity, according to Onwuegbuzie (2000), is concerned with any factors such as bias that may interfere with and induce causation among test variables. Notably, in this study, the researcher was careful to remove any evidence of bias during the collection and assessment of the data. When evaluating internal validity, four forms of validity are considered: face validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, and concept validity. Face validity is the ability of a method to appear to be able to measure the variable it promises to.

Concurrent validity investigates any relationships between the findings of a new measurement method and those of an earlier method that both claim to measure the same variable. Predictive validity refers to the ability of the assessment results of a concept to accurately predict behavior. Construct validity is whether the measurements of a variable in a study behave in the same manner as the variable itself. This type of validity is characterized by the degree of relevance in relation to the study's results (Bagozzi et al, 1991). In this study, while there was evidence of face validity, the researcher was able to maximize on predictive validity, where the findings from this study can be used by future researchers to predict the behavior of the various stakeholders identified in the program, given similar prevailing conditions and circumstances.

The use of measurement tools to study human behavior is a crucial and fundamental component of social science research. As a result, one of any instrument's key characteristics is that it consistently assesses the topic being examined. The general consistency of the measurement tool used in a research project is addressed by reliability. Reliability has been cited by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991), as a major issue when using a psychological test to assess a certain quality or behavior. In other words, the degree to which measurements may be repeated, by other individuals, under various conditions, and consistently yield the same results. Bollen (1989) defined dependability as the constancy of the measurement.

It is important to note that the results of a study are useless if they are not believed to be reliable. If the data does not capture what it intends to measure, it cannot be used to address the research question, which is the primary objective of the study. It will therefore be a waste of time and energy to try to generalize these findings because it is not possible. Additionally, it is essential to remember that just because research is reliable in one circumstance does not mean that it will be reliable in another.

It is important also to emphasize that reliability and validity have complimentary roles in research even though their definitions and goals are different. To effectively represent a research topic, a measurement must be both valid and reliable. Validity cannot exist without reliability. By comparing social science and health care research, the authors Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) demonstrated how the challenges associated with the validity and reliability of measuring instruments are common to various types and kinds of study. The ability of the researcher to test these theoretical constructs, which are abstract ideas, is critical for ensuring that the instruments utilized are in fact valid and trustworthy, which is a fundamental and crucial aspect of research quality. In this study, the researcher identified several constructs that were established in the first part of the study which were later tested against quantitative instruments of research used during the second phase.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Qualitative Data Findings

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Main RQ1: To what extent has the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) reduced the level of youth unemployment within St Kitts and Nevis?

RQ2: What are the most significant features of the STEP?

RQ3: To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

RQ4: What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?

RQ5: What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP?

Hypotheses

H1o: (null) The implementation of STEP has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: (alternative) The implementation of STEP has resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

4.3.2 Themes

Theme One: Perspective

According to research questions one and three, 19 interviewees who responded to questions in relation to their perspective, all felt that STEP was designed to be a short-term training and skills development program that provided temporary employment for its interns. The overall objective was to transform the social and economic landscape and empower people to have spending power. One economist suggested that the program was designed to stabilize income from job losses that arose from the great recession in St Kitts and Nevis. Three interviewees referred to STEP as a social safety net or protection program to bridge the gap for school leavers and a socio-economic program that contributed to reducing poverty, anti-social behavior and crime. Other respondents referred to STEP as a program for budding entrepreneurs and one by which young people were given an opportunity. However, one intern noted that there was a real problem with youth unemployment and STEP did not offer many opportunities for young people at the time.

Respondents from the management and officials of the STEP noted several issues and hindrances in the execution of the program. These included the attitude of interns created by an existing political culture and job entitlement mentality; the “free labor” mentality of the

employer agents; insufficient formal training; indefinite timeline for internship; improper assessment of the program and the political issues affecting the program.

The general expectation of interns is that many participants involved in the program were looking for a job and not necessarily a skill. There was no orientation for employer agents nor interns. Some workers were placed on the program through political affiliation, which contributed to the breakdown of order and good work ethics. Negative attitudes of interns and issues of absenteeism from work go unchecked and unaddressed as there was no proper management of STEP interns by some 600 employers within the private sector to whom they were assigned. When asked to give their opinion of the program, most STEP interns from the two focus groups felt that the program was a good employment opportunity initiative; however, they felt that they were being exploited and disadvantaged by their employers, in terms of long hours of hard work for a minimum wage pay. Most interns who were interviewed felt that the benefits of the STEP were geared more toward private sector employers who received long hours of free labor.

With regards to most of the employer agents, the general impression of most respondents is that they were seeking an employee rather than a trainee. The attitude of employer agents toward STEP workers was one of negativity where interns were looked down upon as inferior and less educated and treated differently than their own workers or others employed within the civil service. There was resistance and reluctance from many of the private sector employers who were unwilling to promote or graduate interns to a state of permanent employment on their payroll. STEP was therefore largely regarded and treated as a full-time job, instead of an intern program. Respondents pointed out that a large percentage of interns did not qualify as youth (18 – 35) and a vast majority of these interns remained on the program indefinitely.

As a result of these issues negatively affecting the program, most respondents felt that there was no major difference or advantage to persons obtaining employment under the STEP program as opposed to those who were not involved.

Theme Two: Skills

With regards to research questions two, three and five, one major aspect of the STEP was designed for interns to acquire a skill at the end of their internship. A total of 15 responses were collated and summarized under the skills component of the program. At the time of data collection, a respondent from the STEP management team informed the researcher that specific data regarding the category of skill sets acquired by the interns was not yet available. Notwithstanding, it was noted by that respondent that most of the interns acquired their knowledge and skills through time spent on the job doing specific tasks with their employers. Another respondent from this stakeholder group said that the program allowed for an increased experience and skill sets toward the country's population pool by creating employment for well over 3,000 individuals.

With respect to the type of skills achieved, government officials who were interviewed felt that budding entrepreneurs and young people were given an opportunity to develop hard and soft skills to contribute toward their personal growth and development. However, some of the respondents in this category were of the view that measures were needed to improve the soft skills component as many of the interns were lacking this important trait needed for the world of work. Respondents identified such behaviors that reflected a lackadaisical attitude, inconsistent work attendance, insubordination and lack of respect for authority exhibited by interns.

Concerning the level of skills acquired, respondents felt that while many interns were able to acquire certain skills from on-the-job training, more hands-on training was required to become skilled workers. Some respondents felt that the indefinite work program created a sense of dependency on the government system where people felt entitled to a job instead of advancing their knowledge and skills to gain permanent employment. From the interviews conducted with the focus groups of interns, the general expectation was that many participants were looking for a job and not necessarily a skill.

In terms of the relevance of skills attained, respondents from the management of STEP and government officials felt that there was an urgent need to focus on the skills training aspect of the program to match the right persons with the right skill sets for the improvement of the economy. One respondent suggested that for the program to be sustainable, there was a need for it to be revamped, with government focusing on the aspect of skills training while the employment aspect and provision of jobs should be the responsibility of the private sector. One intern from the island of Nevis pointed out that she was placed on the program to function in a job position where she had no interest or desire. Other interns from the focus group interviews shared the same sentiments for the matching of jobs with the right skill sets.

Theme Three: Training

With regards to research questions two, three and five, another important component of the Skills Training Empowerment Program is the element of training. From a total of 19 responses about training, the researcher collated the data from the interviewees to arrive at the findings outlined here under this theme. The STEP offers training in areas like carpentry, electricity, hospitality, woodwork, cosmetology and landscaping. Moreover, one of the program's aims was to ensure a measurable training component where participants are assessed in their various fields.

Data extracted from the management of STEP revealed that training takes place in various formats: on the job, by apprenticeship and through formal classes. Apprenticeship arrangements occur when employers request persons from STEP to train for a period of time- usually six months to a year- with an agreement that assignees who attain the level of competency will be hired permanently. There is a small number of people who are presently being trained under this arrangement. According to this respondent from the STEP management team, *“It is the ideal arrangement we try to encourage with employers.”*

Formal classes are organized by institutions such as the Advanced Vocational Education Center (AVEC) and the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College (CFBC) in St. Kitts-Nevis and is done with partnership agencies such as National Youth Skills (NYS) and AVEC. According to an official from the office of the STEP:

“Since 2017 we have trained around 300 persons who have attended full time classes and graduated, mainly from AVEC. Upon graduating, people have become self-employed; others permanently employed and others are still on the program.

We have organized day training for assignees and since 2017, have trained over 800 persons in soft skills, including 200 plus persons in 2022 so far. We have trained 30 persons in supervisory management over 10 weeks in 2022.”

While some interns are trained with AVEC and return for placements with their employers, others end up working with their employers who have trained them (on-the-job), while others venture into their own businesses to become entrepreneurs.

Notwithstanding, the general sentiments expressed by most respondents to the subject of training was a lack of structured formal training and adequate certification; and where there was formal training, it was not properly assessed. One interviewee from the focus group said that he was on the program for four years with no provision for training.

This was reinforced by a respondent from the STEP management who stated:

“There is no formal arrangement or structure in place by STEP to assess what is taught and level of competency attained. What is taught on the job is left to employers and therefore is dependent on how much employers want to teach assignees.”

With regards to the quality of certification, one respondent from a government office in the Department of Labor expressed the need for interns to own a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) and not just a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at the end of the training period. The researcher was informed that a CVQ would allow for interns to be better qualified and more marketable in obtaining a job, not only on a national level but throughout the region. Evidence from the manuscript points to the fact that the success of this component of the program is dependent on the acquirement of a CVQ as opposed to a limited NVQ.

Another respondent from the STEP management suggested that trained skilled workers add value to the economy and become more marketable through such activities like trade shows.

To most of the interns, the focus of STEP was more of an employment opportunity rather than training as they felt that most of their employer agents were seeking an employee rather than a trainee.

Theme Four: Empowerment

According to research questions one, three, four and five, the objective of the empowerment aspect of the program was to transform the social and economic landscape and empower participants to gain spending power. Varied responses from participants noted that

STEP assisted with the upscaling of its participants; provided stability of persons through steady employment; and contributed to spending power and consumption, which makes up a large portion of the country's GDP. From the data collected from STEP officials, the STEP produced several entrepreneurs with established businesses in areas such as cosmetology, hairdressing, landscaping and air-conditioning. It was felt by most respondents that the contribution of STEP toward the reduction of youth unemployment was reflected in entrepreneurship – bridging the employment gap while enabling training. Some people who were trained in cosmetology and landscaping were able to own their own businesses.

However, there were those respondents who felt that while the skills and training aspect of the program was evident, the empowerment aspect was lacking. Some interns felt that empowerment included making grants available for budding entrepreneurs and providing insurance coverage for interns. While interns benefitted from a paycheck and the learning of skills, the objective of gaining permanent employment, in most cases, was not met. The ability for interns to transfer from STEP to a permanent job position was difficult. There was resistance and reluctance from much of the private sector who remained unwilling to promote or graduate interns to permanent employment on their payroll. Interns felt apprehensive of employers who would not upgrade their status from interns to full time employment over the benefits of free labor, which they enjoyed.

In relation to the theme of empowerment, a respondent from the office of STEP quoted:

“We have approximately 30 persons attending short term courses at AVEC and CFBC. These courses are held mostly in the evenings and weekends and run from 6 to 10 weeks. Persons who graduate from these courses tend to stay on STEP rather than venture to self-employment, perhaps afraid of the uncertainties of self-employment. Employers also prefer that they remain on STEP payroll, for obvious reasons.”

Theme Five: Impact

Regarding research questions one, three, four, and five, all nineteen (19) interviewees responded in the affirmative that STEP was important for the economy of St Kitts and Nevis. Fifty-eight per cent (11/19) indicated that this importance related to the fact that STEP provided employment and income support to many people across many sectors of the economy. It was noted that STEP provided a large amount of jobs for individuals and played a key role in the survival of approximately 600 private businesses in terms of covering their labor cost and wage bill; particularly during the years 2020 to 2022 when COVID-19 negatively impacted many small businesses in St Kitts and Nevis.

Participants responding to these research questions surrounding the “impact” theme were of the view that the consistent employment and steady income from STEP helped to improve the standard of living and reduce poverty for approximately 4,000 persons (8% of entire population of St Kitts-Nevis). This provides spending power and consumption, which makes up a large portion of the country’s GDP; hence when a large percentage of STEP workers are empowered to consume, this increases spending power and in turn boosts economic activity. The importance of STEP for the economy was also noted in the response that it helped to provide stability and prevented criminal activity and social unrest.

Of the seven interviewees questioned from the category of government officials, five respondents indicated a positive reduction to youth unemployment as a result of STEP while one agreed that there was a real problem with youth unemployment, but STEP did not offer many opportunities for young people at the time. For those who responded in the affirmative, they felt that budding entrepreneurs and young people were given an opportunity by STEP to develop hard and soft skills and personal growth and development. One respondent noted that the reduction was significant due to the number of young people employed.

Another respondent stated that more persons were now employed, following the implementation of STEP. Respondents also felt that the contribution of STEP toward the reduction of youth unemployment was reflected in entrepreneurship – bridging the employment gap while enabling training.

Based on responses from economists surrounding this theme of impact, it was noted that STEP was able to alleviate and help reduce labor cost for private businesses as well as social costs relating to unemployment. The stabilizing of persons with steady employment and upscaling of STEP interns were all factors associated with the reduction of youth unemployment.

Most interns from the first focus group in particular, responded positively to the question of youth unemployment reduction as a result of STEP; however, stating that, while there were a lot of persons assigned to jobs, the success of the program depended to a large extent on the interns, their interest and their ability and desire to move upward.

From an economic standpoint, respondents noted that STEP allowed for an increased experience and skills set toward the population pool by creating employment for well over 3,000 persons (although the vast majority was government employed as opposed to being employed by the private sector). This contribution to the economic landscape included the upscaling of participants by providing them with on-the-job training, wages and a skill, all at the same time. Additionally, the subsidizing of the wage bill for many private businesses in exchange for free labor provided by STEP interns kept many businesses afloat during COVID-19. Helping private businesses with their wage bill is one of the largest categories of expenditure for any business. With labor cost reduced for private businesses, this alleviated the

social cost relating to unemployment and is noteworthy for St Kitts and Nevis, a country which records the highest minimum wage in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU).

Respondents also noted that STEP produced several entrepreneurs with established businesses in areas such like cosmetology, hairdressing, landscaping and air-conditioning: a definite contribution toward the economy of St Kitts-Nevis.

From a societal perspective, STEP was described by respondents as a socio-economic program that contributed to reducing poverty, anti-social behavior and crime. Although a lot of young people remain unemployed, STEP has helped socially by providing work and its interns remain stable and sustained through a weekly wage. One interviewee stated that there was a sense of pride, ownership and confidence, particularly among interns from Nevis, who were placed on the program.

Another interviewee had mixed feelings about this question of impact. He agreed that the positive contribution of the program was the gainful employment it provided. However, on the negative side, the indefinite work program created a sense of dependency on the system where persons felt entitled to a job instead of advancing their skills to gain permanent employment.

From the interns interviewed via the focus groups, some highlighted the positive aspects of the program that impacted their lives. These included an individual source of income; exposure to work; the development of certain skills; a hands-on experience to develop passion and make connections and the ability to transfer from the program to a permanent job.

4.3.3 Sustainability of the STEP

From the various categories of respondents came differing opinions about sustainability. It was stated by STEP management that the monthly contribution from the government's purse to the private sector on behalf of STEP was approximately 4 million dollars. Notwithstanding this cost, based on the employment level, support to private businesses and the increase of skill sets for interns; the program was considered sustainable in this regard from the perspective of STEP management. One interviewee in this category, however, felt that for the program to be sustainable it needed to be revamped; with government focusing on the aspect of skills training, while the employment aspect and provision of jobs should be the responsibility of the private sector. Another respondent in this category stated that the program can be sustainable if the concept is fully understood by all stakeholders.

Of the seven respondents comprising government officials and youth officers, one respondent noted that it was important to look at the three pillars: economic, societal and environmental but that some regularizing was needed for the program to be more sustainable. Another indicated that the program's sustainability was dependent on the priority of the government, as part of this formed the political impact for employing so many young persons without the rigor of the civil service. Other respondents were not certain of the source of funds for the program and others noted that government usually subsidizes these types of programs, but with the presence of COVID-19, it was uncertain with regards to sustained funding.

The respondents comprising the economists noted that with government being the largest employer, there must be a delicate balance between economic objectives and politics. Due to government's limited fiscal purse, the situation can be difficult when political aspirations override economic objectives. One economist noted that the inflows from the

country's Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program should ensure that the program is funded for several years. On the other hand, with the current pandemic and competition from other countries with similar CBI programs, it was felt that funding for STEP may be negatively impacted. Another respondent was of the view that, in its current form, STEP may not be sustainable; however, with good execution, it could be a useful part of the labor market infrastructure of the economy. Yet, another respondent stated that there will always be the need for such safety net programs as STEP, but streamlining was necessary. Another response was that the government needs to shed some of its employees to the private sector, which should be the engine of growth for the economy.

When asked about the issue of sustainability, an intern respondent from one of the focus groups felt that money from taxpayers should be able to sustain the program. Generally, interns felt apprehensive that their employer agents would not be willing to upgrade their status from interns to full time employment over the benefits of free labor.

4.3.4 Recommended measures for improvement of STEP

A total of 16 respondents from the officials of the STEP management team, the Youth Department, Labor Department and Statistical Office responded to this question of recommendations and measures for improvement of the program.

There is a need to implement a proper structure of the program with clear roles and responsibilities outlined for all parties. This structure would address: the lack of policies and enforce procedures including proper orientation to cultivate the right attitudes for employers and interns; the lack of formal training and proper certification; accountability of expenditure; a fixed period for internship and proper promotion and sensitization of STEP to the public.

The program required a visionary to champion the vision and remain focused without political interference. Removing such a program from the hands of politicians was highly recommended to eliminate bias and favoritism among participants of the program. A team of persons comprising supervisors, project managers and field officers should be employed to execute the overall goal and mission of the program and to ensure the enforcement of policies associated with it.

The issue of proper orientation would address the expectations of both the employer agents and interns at the inception of the internship. Expectations would include an honest day's work for an honest day's pay as well as a fixed period of internship ending with proper certification at the end of internship for the level of qualification achieved. One interviewee stressed the need for interns to own a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) and not just a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at the end of the program.

There is the need to focus on the skills training aspect and match the right people with the right skill sets to improve the economy. There must also be measures put in place to improve soft skills. Respondents felt that the program must ensure a measurable training component where participants are assessed in their various fields as they work closely with the private sector employers. One youth officer suggested a revamping of the system every two years. Monitoring and evaluation were required on a regular basis to address issues and concerns.

To address the issue of entitlement of interns, it was recommended that the mandate for the revolving door policy be enforced. The age of engagement should be capped with no place for retirees. There should be a systematic way of graduating people off the program to identify those who really should benefit from such an initiative.

Respondents were of the view that there is a misunderstanding and underestimation of STEP when it comes to the general populace in St Kitts and Nevis. It was felt that many persons

within the society saw the program merely as a means of providing menial work like cleaning and cutting of grass and not for the variety of skill sets offered. Hence, sensitization of the program to the public will assist in a change of mindsets.

A total of fifteen STEP interns from the two focus groups across St Kitts and Nevis responded to the question on areas for improving the program. Five respondents indicated that there should be an increase of the wages for interns. Three respondents suggested that the management of the program needed attention in terms of improving the structure and adjusting the timeframe for interns. Other responses included the removal of politics and favoritism, the matching of jobs for interns with the right skills set, making grants available for entrepreneurs and provision of insurance coverage for interns. From among the seven participants of one of the focus groups, the mean for rating the program on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest was 5.35.

4.3.5 Quantitative Data Findings

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Main (RQ1): To what extent has the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?

RQ2: What are the most significant features of the STEP?

RQ3: To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

RQ4: What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?

RQ5: What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP?

Hypotheses

H1o: (null) The implementation of STEP has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: (alternative) The implementation of STEP has resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

4.3.6 Results from Questionnaires with STEP Interns

RQ1: To what extent has the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?

From a total of 116 participants in the questionnaire survey, 44 respondents comprised the sample population of interns who were involved in the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) comprising 32 females and 12 males (*Table 2*). Many interns fell among the age group of 20 to 30, with the highest number seven at age 22. A total of seven interns fell among the age grouping of 36 to 45 (*Figure 4*).

Table 2: Distribution Frequency of STEP Interns by Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	12	27.3	27.3	27.3
	Female	32	72.7	72.7	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

Of the 44 respondents, 39 (88.64%) confirmed that they were unemployed before enrolling with the STEP. Additionally, when asked if STEP was their first means of income, 20 persons (45%) responded in the affirmative and 24 (55%) said it was not.

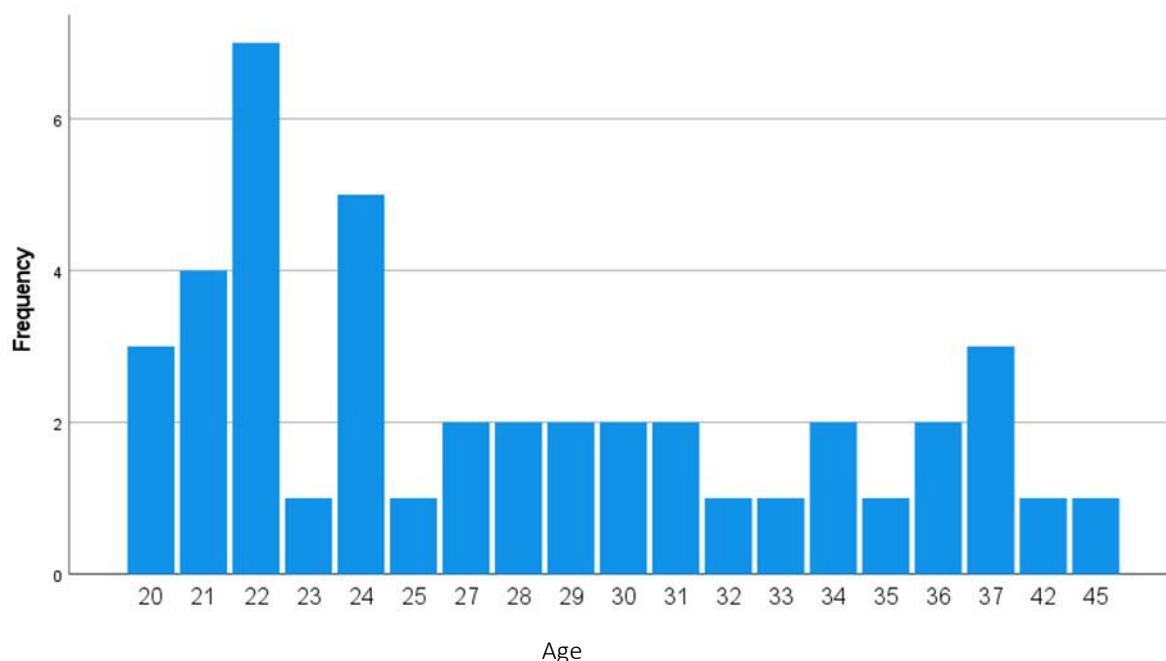


Figure 4: Distribution Frequency of STEP Interns by Age
Source: Data from Survey, 2022

Participants in the program were asked to what extent did STEP helped to increase their income. Fourteen people (32%) responded to neutral, eleven persons (25%) said the extent was moderate and 10 persons (23%) said to a large extent (*Figure 5*).

15. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, to what extent has the STEP helped to increase your income? Select only one.

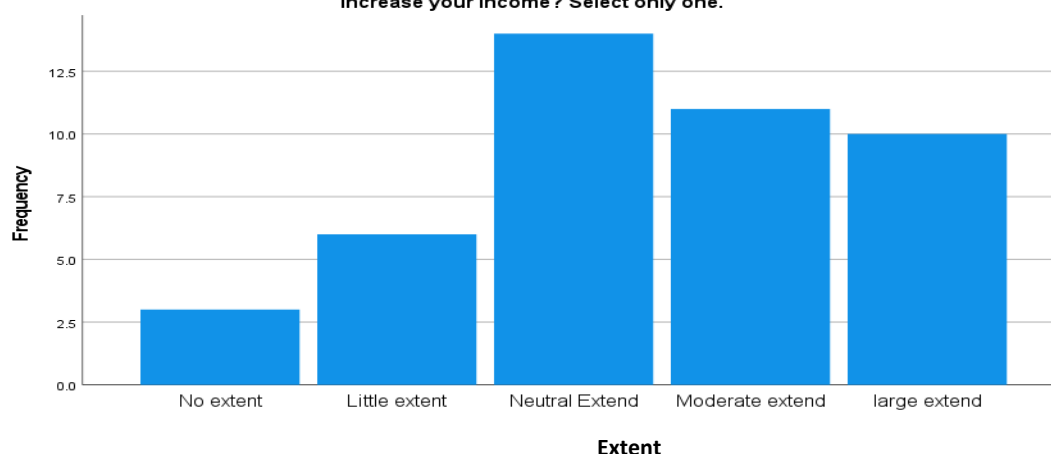


Figure 5: Extent to Which STEP Helped to Increase Income

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

When questioned about their overall experience with the program, 18 people (41%) were satisfied, 14 (32%) were neutral and 7 (16%) were very satisfied, with the remaining five persons in the negative (*Figure 6*). In addition, the data revealed that 39 people out of 44 which represents 88.64% would recommend the program to others who had not experienced it.

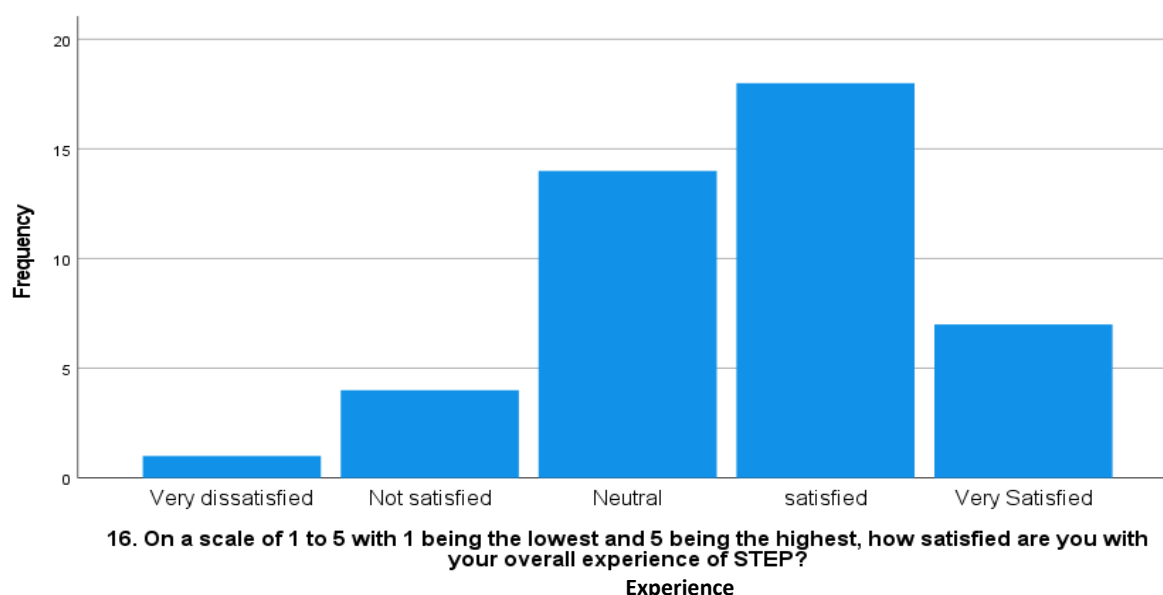


Figure 6: Overall Experience of STEP

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

RQ2: What are the most significant features of the STEP?

From the sample of STEP interns, in terms of benefits achieved from the program, there were a variety of responses to select from. However, the most popular selection from 15 respondents was the combination of improved skills; training experience; employment opportunity and income opportunity.

RQ3: To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

Notably, most respondents from the sample of STEP interns felt that there was no major difference or advantage to persons obtaining employment under the STEP program as opposed to those who were not involved.

RQ4: What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?

With regards to method of selection for the program, the data revealed that 50 per cent (22) of interns were successful via applications while the remainder were selected by referrals, employers and other reasons. When questioned about their understanding of the purpose of the program, 17 respondents or 39% saw it as an employment opportunity. Additionally, the data revealed that from a total of 44 interns, 19 persons (43%) were on the program over a period of 1 – 3 years while 21 persons (48%) were interns for over a 4 to 6-year period.

As it relates to the financial impact of STEP on their lives, 16 persons were neutral, 12 said that it was moderate; 10 said the impact was an extreme one and 5 responded to a little impact. Similarly, using a Likert scale of comparison from 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, 22 respondents or 50% rated the program as extremely important, while 16 persons (36%) felt it was very important and 5 persons responded that it was important (Figure 7).

Rate of Importance of STEP

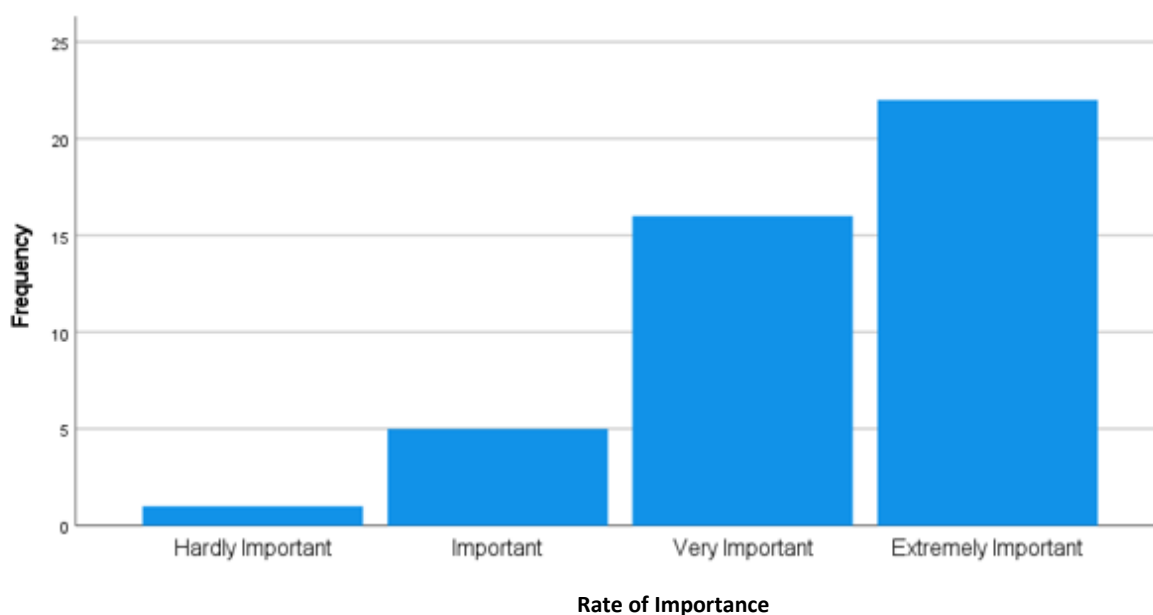


Figure 7: Rate of Importance of STEP

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

RQ5: What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP?

From the question that focused on factors that positively contributed to STEP, 8 interns were of the view that it was good management while the remainder of respondents cited a combination of reasons including choice selection of interns, adequate wage, and equality and justice. On the other hand, when asked to identify hindrances affecting the program, 11 respondents or 25% felt that the sole reason was the selection or choice of interns while 9 respondents or 20% suggested the sole reason was inadequate wages.

Notably, when participants were asked about opportunities to improve the program most persons cited increase of pay; program assessment for effectiveness; mechanism for transition to permanent employment and provision of more jobs. Five persons felt that the program should remain as it is without any changes.

4.3.7 Results from Sample of Unemployed Non-STEP participants

From a total of 116 participants in the questionnaire survey, 40 respondents (34%) comprised the sample population of unemployed youth who were not involved in the STEP. Of this number, 28 were females and 12 were males with the vast majority of 25 persons (62.5%) at age 18 (*Table 3*).

Table 3: Age Categories of Unemployed Youth

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
17	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
18	25	62.5	62.5	65.0
19	3	7.5	7.5	72.5
20	3	7.5	7.5	80.0
22	2	2.5	2.5	82.5
24	2	5.0	5.0	87.5
25	1	2.5	2.5	90.0
27	2	5.0	5.0	95.0
28	1	2.5	2.5	97.5
29	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

Thirty-six persons (90%) indicated they were unemployed while 4 were employed on a part-time basis. In response to the reasons for their status, 27 respondents indicated they were unable to find work while 5 were laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and another 5 lacked skills and/or qualification. Seventy-five per cent (30) of the respondents said they had no knowledge of STEP while twenty-five per cent (10) responded in the affirmative; however, when asked about their participation in the program the response was a sharp contrast with 10

persons responding yes and 30 responding no. Additionally, 16 (40%) of the respondents stated that they weren't given the opportunity to be a part of the program (*Table 4*).

Table 4: Reasons for Non-Participation of Youth in STEP

Reason	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not aware	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
Unanswered	3	7.5	7.5	22.5
Heard about STEP	4	10.0	10.0	32.5
Uninterested	2	5.0	5.0	37.5
No Opportunity	16	40.0	40.0	77.5
Other	9	22.5	22.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

When asked to give their opinion of the program, the responses were varied. Seven persons felt that it was an opportunity to reduce unemployment; ten persons saw it as a skills/training program and eleven persons referred to the program as a job assistance for youth.

From the respondents' rating of the program which gives an indication of the program's impact on their lives (RQ1), 18 persons responded in the neutral while 10 persons felt it was successful and 7 responded very successful (*Table 5*). With regards to their reasons for rating, the more popular responses were benefit to the economy; benefit to people/students; and a harder time obtaining a job without STEP.

Table 5: Rate of Success Toward Step

Rate	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Hardly Successful	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
Neutral	18	45.0	45.0	57.5
Successful	10	25.0	25.0	82.5
Very Successful	7	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

Based on the responses given from questions 12, 13 and 14 of the questionnaire which are linked to research questions 1 and 4, the researcher discovered that for question 12, when asked about the financial impact of persons on the STEP, almost half of the respondents (19) remained in the neutral while 8 persons stated that there was improvement and 7 said much improvement. Similarly, for question 13, in rating the reduction of unemployment as a result of STEP, 21 respondents remained neutral with 13 suggesting a moderate reduction in unemployment (*Table 6*).

Table 6: Rate of Reduction in Unemployment

Rate	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No reduction in unemployment	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
Hardly any reduction in unemployment	2	5.0	5.0	7.5
Neutral	21	52.5	52.5	60.0
Moderate reduction in unemployment	13	32.5	32.5	92.5
Vast reduction in unemployment	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

From an examination of Question 14 which addressed the level of importance placed on a program like STEP, 20 respondents (50%) of the sample felt that it was extremely important, 9 or 23% felt that it was important and another 9 felt that it was very important. Reasons cited for this importance ranged from decrease of unemployment, stimulation of economic growth, financial assistance and help for families, creation and provision of jobs.

4.3.8 Youth Unemployment Rate in St Kitts-Nevis

Statistics obtained from the Department of Statistics revealed that in 2013, youth unemployment was at a rate of 8.1% (*Table 7*). This rate decreased to 4.5% (approximately 50%) in the year 2016 (*Table 8*) but rose alarmingly to 12.8% in the year 2018 (*Table 9*).

4.3.9 Impact on Labor market in St Kitts-Nevis

Prior to 2015 and during STEP 2017-2018, based on data obtained from the Statistics Department in the Government of St Kitts and Nevis, according to the Labor Market summary indicators displayed below, prior to STEP, 2013 reflected a total of 25,600 persons who were employed in the labor market with a total unemployment rate of 3.9%. In 2013, the youth unemployment rate was 8.1%. Notably, for 2018, (post-STEP implementation), while there was an increase in total employment in the labor force to 27,100 persons, the total unemployment rate also increased to 6.8% with youth unemployment to 12.8%.

Table 7: St Kitts and Nevis Labor Market Summary Indicators by Sex 2013

	Male	Female	Total
Working age population ('000s)	16	18	33.7
Labor force ('000s)	12	13	25.6
Labor force participation rate (%)	77.5	74.7	76.0
Employment ('000s)	12	13	24.6
Employment to population ratio (%)	75.1	71.2	73.1
Unemployment ('000s)	0.4	0.6	1.0
Unemployment rate (%)	3.1	4.6	3.9
Tim-related underemployed ('000s)	2.6	2.3	4.9
Time-related underemployed as a share of labor force (%)	21.1	17.0	19.0
Youth unemployment ('000s)	0.1	0.3	0.4
Youth unemployment rate (%)	4.3	11.7	8.1
Youth Neet share of youth population (%)	4.0	11.2	7.7
Share of vulnerable employment in total employment (%)	10.8	6.5	8.6
Earnings (local currency units)	2641.7	2296.4	2465.2

Source: Statistical Department, Government of St Kitts and Nevis, 2022

Table 8: St Kitts and Nevis Labor Market Summary Indicators by Sex 2016

Category	Male	Female	Total
Working-age population ('000s)	14	15	29.6
Labor force ('000s)	11	11	22.1
Labor force participation rate (%)	76.0	74.0	74.9
Employment ('000s)	11	11	21.7
Employment-to-population ratio (%)	74.4	72.6	73.4
Unemployment ('000s)	0.2	0.2	0.4
Unemployment rate (%)	2.1	1.9	2.0
Time-related underemployed ('000s)	0.1	0.1	0.3
Time-related underemployment as a share of labor force (%)	1.2	1.3	1.2
Youth unemployment ('000s)	0.1	0.1	0.2
Youth unemployment rate (%)	4.2	4.5	4.5
Earnings (local currency units)	5.3	4.9	5.1

Source: Statistical Department, Government of St Kitts and Nevis, 2022

Table 9: St Kitts and Nevis Labor Market Summary table by sex

Category	Male	Female	Total
Working-age population ('000s)	16	21	37.1
Labor force ('000s)	13	15	27.1
Labor force participation rate (%)	76.7	70.1	73.0
Employment ('000s)	12	14	25.2
Employment – to-population ratio (%)	70.7	66.0	68.1
Unemployment ('000s)	1.0	0.9	1.8
Unemployment rate (%)	7.8	5.8	6.8
Time-related underemployed ('000s)	1.8	2.0	3.8
Time-related underemployment as a share of labor force (%)	14.6	13.7	14.1
Youth unemployment ('000s)	0.6	0.4	1.0
Youth unemployment rate (%)	15.2	10.5	12.8

Source: Statistical Department, Government of St Kitts and Nevis, 2022

4.3.10 Impact on the Economy of St Kitts-Nevis

According to data obtained from the STEP office, the Government of St Kitts-Nevis' annual assistance to the private sector in terms of wage bill is EC\$4 million and there are currently 600 private businesses that benefit from this safety net program.

Additionally, based on records provided by the STEP office, the number of persons employed on the STEP program is more than 3,500 across St Kitts and Nevis.

STEP interns receive a wage of EC\$9.00 per hour. Hence, within a 40-hour week, interns receive a weekly wage total of EC\$360, which is the standard national minimum wage of the country.

Table 10: Pearson Correlation – 2-tailed

R = .234

		Rate of Reduction of unemployment	Rate of STEP success
Rate of Reduction of unemployment	Pearson Correlation	1	.234
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.146
	N	40	40
Rate of STEP success	Pearson Correlation	.234	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.146	
	N	40	40

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

From the Pearson Correlation test to determine the association between the rate of reduction of unemployment and the rate of STEP success, the significance is .146. Where the p-value is less than .05 there is evidence of a statistically significant bivariate association between the two variables.

Table 11: Spearman's Rank Correlation – 2-tailed Result

		Rate of Reduction of unemployment	Rate of STEP success
Spearman's rho	Rate of Reduction of unemployment	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.087
		N	40
	Rate of STEP success	Correlation Coefficient	.274
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.087
		N	40

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

Following Pearson Correlation, the Spearman's Rank Correlation co-efficient was also used to measure the strength and direction between the rate of reduction of unemployment and the rate of STEP success, with a significance of .087. When compared to 1 which represents a perfect positive relationship, the result indicates a strong positive relationship where the two variables move in the same direction. In other words, an increase in one will result in an increase in the other.

4.3.11 Chi Squared Test for STEP interns and Unemployed Youth

A chi-square test is a statistical test that is used to compare observed and expected results. The goal of this test is to identify whether a disparity between actual and predicted data is due to chance or to a link between the variables under consideration, which are employability and unemployment.

Table 12: Chi Square Test – Results of STEP Interns

	value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	80.275 ^a	16	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	64.526	16	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	29.535	1	<.001
N of Valid Cases	44		

^a 24 cells (96.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

The results of this test on the STEP interns indicate that 24 of the total number of cells (the equivalent of 96%) have an expected count less than 5, which means that in those specific scenarios, the predicted number of occurrences is quite low. In other words, this is saying that only 4% of the cells have an expected count larger than 5. Notably, with the minimum expected count being 0.07, it means that even in the cells with the fewest expected occurrences, the researcher would still expect a very small fraction of an occurrence.

Table 13: Chi Square Test – Results of Unemployed/ Non-STEP Youth

	value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.218 ^a	12	.004
Likelihood Ratio	24.393	12	.018
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.138	1	.144
N of Valid Cases	40		

a. 17 cells (85.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13

Source: Data from Survey, 2022

The results of this test on unemployed youth who were not engaged in STEP indicates that 17 of the total amounts of cells have an expected count less than 5, which simply means that in those specific cases, the anticipated number of occurrences is rather low. In fact, 85% of all the cells fall into this category. When the expected count is less than 5, statisticians caution that the reliability of the findings may be compromised due to small sample sizes. Regarding the minimum expected count of 0.13, this indicates that even in the cell with the fewest anticipated occurrences, the researcher would still expect a tiny fraction of an occurrence.

4.4 Evaluation of Findings

Research Question and Hypotheses

Main (RQ1): To what extent has the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?

Hypotheses

H1o: (null) The implementation of STEP has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: (alternative) The implementation of STEP has resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

Summary of Findings -RQ1

From the qualitative data reports pertaining to the main research question, STEP was designed to be a short-term internship program to prepare its participants to obtain the requisite skills and necessary training to obtain permanent employment while earning income. As such, the findings generally suggest to the researcher that STEP indeed made some level of contribution and impact toward employment reduction in St Kitts and Nevis.

Notwithstanding, however, from the assessment of the data, it appears that while this safety net program has contributed immensely to the socio-economic landscape of St Kitts and Nevis and has made a significant impact on employment in general, to a large extent the program has not fulfilled its intended objective of training and empowering persons with the necessary skills to move from internship to permanent employment. From an analysis of the qualitative data the STEP was not able to fulfill all its intended objectives, particularly in the provision of skills. While many interns were able to acquire skills, there is no structure in place by the management of STEP to measure and assess these skill sets and their impact on the economy.

With respect to training, the findings revealed that while there were various aspects of training, most of the training with interns was on-the-job hands-on training. Although training was accomplished to some extent, this element of the program lacked the proper structure, assessment and measurement tools that were not implemented.

Additionally, while STEP provided work for some 4,000 persons, approximately 75% did not constitute the youth population between the ages of 18 to 35. Hence, while a reduction was made in unemployment, a very small percentage of this reduction affected the youth population.

In relation to the empowerment objective of this safety net program, an assessment of the data received from respondents indicated that a vast number of persons benefitted from the program with regards to employment. Notwithstanding this accomplishment, a vast majority of interns have also remained on the program for several years and have not been successful in gaining permanent employment, for various reasons outlined above. The data revealed that a small unconfirmed percentage was able to venture into entrepreneurship and establish their own businesses. However, quite a larger unconfirmed percentage has not been able to move beyond the aspect of obtaining a monthly or weekly minimum wage payment.

Application of theory – RQ1

From a review of the literature, research done by the International Labor Office (ILO) has proven that young people have more difficulty finding their first job (ILO, 2011). Interestingly, however, based on the findings resulting from the quantitative survey in relation to Research Question #1, 39 out of 44 respondents confirmed that they were unemployed before

enrolling with the STEP; and when asked if STEP was their first means of income, 20 persons responded in the affirmative and 24 said no. Hence, the assumption can be made from the results of both data sets, that because of the government's implementation of STEP in the Federation of St Kitts and Nevis, the difficulty of obtaining a job for some of the youth was minimized.

The researcher sought to compare these findings for RQ1 against the job-search theory and the labor-market theory outlined in the literature. According to McCall, (1970) and Mortensen, (1970), the job-search theory relates to the strategy of job-search for youthful workers with lesser capabilities. This hypothesis predicted that the increased rate of unemployment among youth directly relates to a high recurrence of joblessness among that populace. While the evidence of this theory holds true for the majority of STEP interns who had not acquired a high level of education and were unskilled and untrained at the time of employment; on the other hand, there was no evidence of a high recurrence of joblessness among that population as the program provided consistent steady employment. From the findings the answer to this research question is to accept the null hypothesis that the implementation of STEP has not resulted in a reduction of youth unemployment.

RQ2: What are the most significant features of the STEP?

H1o (null): There are no significant features of STEP contributing to its success.

H1a (alternative): There are significant features of STEP that account for its success.

Summary of Findings – RQ2

From the qualitative interviews conducted, the findings revealed that the most significant features of the STEP are its three components that comprise the main objectives of the program: the skills component, the training component and the empowerment aspect of the program.

Similarly, from the quantitative survey comprising a sample set of 44 interns, the most popular selection from 15 respondents was the combination of improved skills; training experience; employment opportunity and income opportunity.

Skills

With respect to the type of skills achieved, some of the respondents in this category were of the view that measures were needed to improve the soft skills component as many of the interns were lacking this important trait needed for the world of work. The general expectation was that many participants were looking for a job and not necessarily a skill. Concerning the level of skills acquired, respondents felt that while the majority of interns were able to acquire certain skills from on-the-job training, more hands-on training was required to become skilled workers.

In terms of the relevance of skills attained, respondents from the management of STEP and government officials felt that there was an urgent need to focus on the skills training aspect of the program to match the right persons with the right skill sets for the improvement of the economy. Other interns from the focus group interviews shared the same sentiments for the matching of jobs with the right skill sets.

Application of Theory – RQ2

With regards to the labor search, the advancement of the “matching function” stands out as being possibly the foremost essential development in job search hypothesis. The findings

revealed that this element of matching the right person with the right skill sets was one of the main issues that may have hindered the further advancement of the STEP program.

It is noteworthy that this ‘skills mismatch’ theoretical framework of youth unemployment and the economy of St Kitts and Nevis has been similarly employed in many research studies conducted in Caribbean countries, where the findings suggest that lack of aptitude, inexperience and lack of information are all contributing factors towards the high level of youth unemployment, resulting in uncertified laborers (Downes, 2006). UNECLAC (2005) concurs with this hypothesis of mismatch referring to the fact that laborers do not have the right skills that are required. Likewise, the findings emanating from the STEP interviews and questionnaire surveys are similar in keeping with the expectations of this theory.

Training

The general sentiments expressed by most respondents who were interviewed about training was a lack of structured formal training and adequate certification; and where there was formal training, it was not properly assessed. Evidence from the manuscript points to the fact that the success of this component of the program was dependent on the acquirement of a CVQ as opposed to a limited NVQ. To most of the interns, the focus of STEP was more of an employment opportunity rather than training as they felt that most of their employer agents were seeking an employee rather than a trainee.

Empowerment

From the qualitative data collected from STEP officials, the STEP produced several entrepreneurs with established businesses in areas such as cosmetology, hairdressing, landscaping and air-conditioning. It was felt by most respondents that the contribution of STEP toward the reduction of youth unemployment is reflected in entrepreneurship. However, there

were those respondents who felt that while the skills and training aspect of the program was evident, the empowerment aspect was lacking.

Application of concepts in relation to theory – RQ2

As outlined in the literature review, one of the important criteria of the skills mismatch theory is that of *allocative effectiveness*, which suggests that each laborer ought to be utilized within the occupation to which he is most suited. Again, evidence of this trait is reflected under the broad theme of ‘training’ in relation to the data received from interns. The majority of respondents claimed that they were placed in jobs for which they lacked the motivation and expertise necessary to perform well and as such, this concept holds true in light of this particular study.

RQ3: To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

H1o (null): It is difficult for people trained by STEP to obtain employment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a (alternative): It is easy for STEP trainees to obtain employment in St Kitts and Nevis.

Summary of Findings – RQ3

The findings from the qualitative study revealed that the general expectation of interns is that many participants involved in the program were looking for a job and not necessarily a skill. There was no orientation for employer agents nor interns. Some workers were placed on the program through political affiliation, which contributed to the breakdown of order and good work ethics. Negative attitudes of interns and issues of absenteeism from work go unchecked

and unaddressed as there was no proper management of STEP interns by some 600 employers within the private sector to whom they are assigned. The attitude of employer agents toward STEP workers was one of negativity where interns were looked down upon as inferior and less educated and treated differently than their own workers or others employed within the civil service. The majority of STEP interns from the two focus groups felt that the program was a good employment opportunity initiative; however, they felt that they were being exploited and disadvantaged by their employers, in terms of long hours of hard work for a minimum wage pay.

Respondents were of the view that there is a misunderstanding and underestimation of STEP when it comes to the general populace in St Kitts and Nevis; and that sensitization of the program to the public will assist in a change of mindsets. As such, most respondents from both data sets (qualitative and quantitative) felt that there was no major difference or advantage to persons obtaining employment under the STEP program as opposed to those who were not involved, for reasons afore mentioned.

Application of concepts in relation to theory – RQ3

Yet, another criterion in the literature on which the mismatch theory hinges is *full employment*, which suggests the readiness of each laborer to work at the current wage paid to individuals of comparable capacities. While interns benefitted from a paycheck and the learning of skills, the objective of gaining permanent employment for upward mobility and advancement, in most cases, was not met. The ability for interns to transfer from STEP to a permanent job position was difficult. There was resistance and reluctance from much of the private sector who remained unwilling to promote or graduate interns to permanent employment on their payroll. Additionally, some interns express concern with their minimum wage in

exchange for long hours of labor. In this aspect there appears to be some contradiction with what the theory states versus the expectation of the interns on the STEP program.

RQ4: What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?

H1o (null): The activities of STEP have not resulted in any economic impact for St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a (alternative): The activities of STEP have resulted in economic impact for St Kitts and Nevis.

Summary of Findings - RQ4

It was stated by STEP management that the monthly contribution from the government's purse to the private sector on behalf of STEP was approximately 4 million dollars. Notwithstanding this cost, based on the employment level, support to private businesses and the increase of skill sets for interns; the program was considered sustainable in this regard from the perspective of STEP management.

All nineteen (19) interviewees from the qualitative segment of the study responded in the affirmative that STEP was important for the economy of St Kitts and Nevis. Sixty per cent (11/19) indicated that this importance related to the fact that STEP provided employment and income support to many people across many sectors of the economy. It was noted that STEP provided several jobs for individuals and played a key role in the survival of approximately 600 private businesses in terms of covering their labor cost and wage bill; particularly during the years 2020 to 2022 when COVID-19 negatively impacted many small businesses in St Kitts and Nevis.

From an economic standpoint, respondents noted that STEP allowed for an increase of experience and skill sets toward the population pool by creating employment for well over 3,000 persons. Participants responding to these research questions surrounding the “impact” theme were of the view that the consistent employment and steady income from STEP helped to improve the standard of living and reduce poverty for approximately 4,000 persons (7% of entire population of St Kitts-Nevis). This provides spending power and consumption, which makes up a large portion of the country’s GDP.

Additionally, the subsidizing of the wage bill for many private businesses in exchange for free labor provided by STEP interns kept many businesses afloat during COVID-19. Helping private businesses with their wage bill is one of the largest categories of expenditure for any business. With labor cost reduced for private businesses, this alleviated the social cost relating to unemployment and is noteworthy for St Kitts and Nevis, a country which records the highest minimum wage within the countries of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU).

From the results of the quantitative survey, most respondents (17) saw the impact of STEP as an employment opportunity, according to Perri (2004). Interestingly, the data revealed that from a total of 44 interns, 19 persons were on the program over a period of 1 – 3 years while 21 persons were interns for over a 4 to 6-year period. In relation to the program’s financial impact on their lives, 16 persons were neutral, 12 said that it was moderate; 10 said the impact was an extreme one and 5 responded to a little impact. Similarly, using a Likert scale of comparison from 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, 22 respondents rated the program as extremely important, while 16 persons felt it was very important.

Application of Theory – RQ4

Another interesting and relevant theory purported by Qun Zeng (2012) and found in the literature is that of unemployment deprivation within the context of social relationship

exclusion. According to Perri (2004), robust social structures and systems may stimulate the "network of opportunity," which can disclose additional social resources and ultimately provide aid to help people overcome unemployment and poverty. His research defends the claim that government-funded training and internship programs like STEP can cause trainees to identify as unemployed, which can worsen internal communication and contribute to social isolation.

Governments can provide unemployed youngsters with training to enhance their employability skills and connect them with business entities, who make up the employed group. This will make it easier to create cohesive social structures in which the unemployed may build their networks and learn more about available jobs, increasing their chances of finding employment sooner (Meijers & Riele, 2004; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1999). Clearly, from an evaluation of the study's findings, some evidence of this theory is seen, resulting in the alternative hypothesis, in this case.

RQ5: What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP?

H1o (null): There are no opportunities to improve the current design of the STEP program in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a (alternative): There are opportunities available to improve the current design of STEP in St Kitts and Nevis.

Summary of findings – RQ5

A total of 16 respondents from the officials of the STEP management team, the Youth Department, Labor Department and Statistical Office provided recommendations and measures for improvement of the program. These included the need to implement a proper structure of the program with clear roles and responsibilities outlined for all parties, a visionary to

champion the vision and remain focused without political interference; the issue of proper orientation to address the expectations of both the employer agents and interns at the inception of the internship.

The findings also revealed the need to focus on the skills training aspect and match the right people with the right skill sets to improve the economy. Respondents felt that the program must ensure a measurable training component where participants are assessed in their various fields as they work closely with the private sector employers.

To address the issue of entitlement of interns, it was recommended that the mandate for the revolving door policy be enforced. The age of engagement should be capped with no place for retirees. There should be a systematic way of graduating people off the program to identify those who really should benefit from such an initiative.

A total of fifteen STEP interns from the two focus groups across St Kitts and Nevis responded to the question on areas for improving the program. Five respondents indicated that there should be an increase of the wages for interns. Three respondents suggested that the management of the program needed attention in terms of improving the structure and adjusting the timeframe for interns. Other responses included the removal of politics and favoritism, the matching of jobs for interns with the right skills set, making grants available for entrepreneurs and provision of insurance coverage for interns. From among the seven participants of one of the focus groups, the mean for rating the program on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest was 5.35.

In comparison to the results from the qualitative interviews, many of the interns who took the quantitative survey responded similarly. Notably, when participants were asked about opportunities to improve the program the majority of persons cited increase of pay, program

assessment of effectiveness; mechanism for transition to permanent employment and provision of more jobs.

Application of Theory – RQ5

Due to issues including limited labor market information, low labor productivity, and the mismatch between skills and jobs, the current rules and regulations governing labor markets in the Caribbean provide significant challenges regarding teenage unemployment. Indeed, during the study, the researcher experienced some difficulty in obtaining labor market information as some of the data had not been collated at the time of research and as a result, was not available. Similarly, the findings revealed low levels of productivity in cases where the program suffered high levels of absenteeism and a lack of skill sets for certain jobs.

4.5 Summary

In Chapter 4, this type of research conducted by the researcher is defined as one of qualitative and quantitative data mixed inside a single study, with their strengths complementing each other. The approach to the order of data gathering for this study comprised qualitative and quantitative phases running sequentially. Hence, for this investigation, the researcher facilitated exploratory research within a sequential mixed methods design approach known as triangulation, that involved qualitative and quantitative data.

The data collected from the personal interviews in the first phase was assessed and analyzed using Taguette, while the data collected from questionnaires in the second phase was analyzed using SPSS. The qualitative (exploratory) findings from the first phase of data collection were used as a foundation to subsequently test and compare the data received in the second phase (quantitative).

While there were two known variables identified in Phase 1 (the STEP program and youth unemployment), the researcher discovered in the subsequent part of the study that there were other possible variables in the mix that could impact youth unemployment within St Kitts and Nevis. These were identified as the labor market, wage bill and government assistance to private sector businesses.

The researcher selected a parallel relationship pertaining to both sample sets, while a critical case sampling technique was employed for the qualitative aspect of the study. However, for the sequential phase of data collection in relation to the quantitative data, the researcher employed a probability sampling method using a stratified sampling technique to gather data. From a sample population of 150 participants across St Kitts and Nevis, qualitative data was captured from 34 semi-structured interviews classified according to four categories of respondents. The data was then categorized according to five primary constructs reflecting the five major themes. These five constructs were identified as *perspective*, *skills*, *training*, *empowerment* and *impact*. The researcher decided that it was appropriate to use the main constructs of the program based on its objectives to identify themes and code the responses received likewise. With the assistance of Taguette, the transcripts were imported, then coded and categorized to formulate these broad themes to address the research questions. Of the 34 interviewees, a total of 170 responses were coded and categorized.

With regards to the labor search and the application of theory, the findings revealed that this element of matching the right person with the right skill sets was one of the main issues that may have hindered the further advancement of the STEP program. The findings also revealed the need to focus on the skills training aspect and match the right people with the right skill sets to improve the economy.

Respondents felt that the program must ensure a measurable training component where participants are assessed in their various fields as they work closely with the private sector employers.

The findings from the qualitative study revealed that the general expectation of interns was that many participants involved in the program were looking for a job and not necessarily a skill. The majority of STEP interns from the two focus groups felt that the program was a good employment opportunity initiative; however, they felt that they were being exploited and disadvantaged by their employers, in terms of long hours of hard work for a minimum wage pay. Additionally, the findings revealed that there was no orientation for employer agents nor interns. Some workers were placed on the program through political affiliation, which contributed to the breakdown of order and good work ethics.

The researcher discovered that STEP provided several jobs for individuals and played a key role in the survival of approximately 600 private businesses in terms of covering their labor cost and wage bill; particularly during the years 2020 to 2022 when COVID-19 negatively impacted many small businesses in St Kitts and Nevis. According to data obtained from the STEP office, the Government of St Kitts-Nevis' annual assistance to the private sector in terms of wage bill is EC\$4 million and there are currently 600 private businesses that benefitted from this safety net program. It was also confirmed that STEP was able to alleviate and help reduce labor costs for private businesses as well as social costs relating to unemployment. The stabilizing of persons with steady employment and upscaling of STEP interns were all factors associated with the reduction of youth unemployment. Some respondents highlighted the positive aspects of the program that impacted their lives which included an individual source of income; exposure to work; the development of certain skills; a hands-on experience to develop passion and make connections and the ability to transfer from the program to a permanent job.

As such, the findings generally suggested to the researcher that STEP indeed made some level of contribution and impact toward employment reduction in St Kitts and Nevis. Notwithstanding, however, from the assessment of the data, it appears that while this safety net program had contributed immensely to the socio-economic landscape of St Kitts and Nevis and had made a significant impact on employment in general, to a large extent the program had not fulfilled its intended objective of training and empowering persons with the necessary skills to move from internship to permanent employment.

A total of 16 respondents from the officials of the STEP management team, the Youth Department, Labor Department and Statistical Office provided recommendations and measures for improvement of the program. These included the need to implement a proper structure of the program with clear roles and responsibilities outlined for all parties; a visionary to champion the vision and remain focused without political interference; and the issue of proper orientation to address the expectations of both the employer agents and interns at the inception of the internship.

The existing rules and regulations governing labor markets in the Caribbean present major challenges as it relates to youth unemployment and this is qualified by such factors as inadequate labor market information, low levels of labor productivity and the mismatch between skills and jobs. During the study, the researcher experienced some difficulty in obtaining labor market information from the Labor Department as some of the data had not been collated at the time of research and as a result, was not available. Similarly, in keeping with theories afore mentioned, the findings revealed low levels of productivity in cases where the program suffered high levels of absenteeism and a lack of skill sets for certain jobs.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth unemployment has indeed become a global threat and is by no means an exception to small-island economies such as St. Kitts and Nevis. This research study seeks to assess and examine the prevailing issue of high levels of youth unemployment within the context and framework of a safety net public policy program initiated and implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis. While much research has been done globally to examine the many issues related to youth unemployment, particularly in the Caribbean diaspora and small island economies like St. Kitts and Nevis, little research has been done to identify the underlying causes and commitments of the problem and potential long-term solutions.

Yet, the high levels of youth unemployment continue to persist and increase; and has exacerbated following the global financial crisis between 2007 and early 2009, and within more recent times with the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, one of the major issues for Caribbean governments such as St. Kitts and Nevis is the inability to grapple with and mitigate the challenges of youth unemployment by successfully implementing safety net programs such as the Skills Training and Empowerment Program (STEP). It is against this backdrop that this problem statement was formulated to find viable and sustainable solutions to this long-standing problem of youth unemployment within the economy of St Kitts and Nevis.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) to determine its impact on the reduction of youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis' economy. Hence, the goal of this study was to examine safety net programs like STEP and their effects on the rates of youth unemployment in small island economies like St. Kitts and Nevis because studies done in the larger Caribbean territories have shown that high rates of youth unemployment have a detrimental impact on these economies.

The overall aim of the study was to evaluate the sustainability of this skills training program's implementation in relation to the decline in youth unemployment and societal economic gain, as well as to pinpoint areas that need improvement. The researcher anticipated that the findings would add to the body of knowledge on understudied aspects of youth unemployment in the St. Kitts and Nevis economy, and that they will be of significant value to other partner organizations, such as the Federal Government of St. Kitts and Nevis, the Eastern Central Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, and the International Labor Organization.

To accomplish this objective, a sequential mixed methods strategy known as triangulation, which combined qualitative and quantitative data in a single study, with their strengths complementing one another, was used by the researcher to perform exploratory research. To investigate and assess the STEP program and ascertain the degree of its impact on the reduction of youth unemployment on the economy, as a direct result of its execution, the study integrated parts of primary and secondary research. The study utilized face to face interviews and on-line questionnaires to gather data from 150 participants across St Kitts and Nevis to answer the main research question.

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were the research tools employed to collect the qualitative data from the first sample of participants; after which the researcher utilized the recommended Taguette software program to identify realities and assumptions related to the fundamental causes of this situation of youth unemployment. From the quantitative perspective, two different types of questionnaires were then created as tools to collect data from a second sample of STEP interns and unemployed youth. From these, quantifiable data was gathered and evaluated using SPSS.

The study's limitations included the lack of occasionally inconsistent or unavailable data; a decline in questionnaire respondents due to erroneous contact information; and the researcher's unintentional omission of STEP employer agents throughout the data gathering procedure. Notwithstanding, the views regarding their employers were shared by the interns. The study also found areas of weakness in relation to a gap in the data acquired from the Saint Kitts - Nevis Labor Survey which was only available up to 2018 while the comparison data from STEP was more current (2021). Similarly, due to a lack of documented data when the researcher was in the process of gathering the information, the researcher was unable to get from the STEP office an exact figure regarding the number of people who had become entrepreneurs because of the program.

Ethical principles and practices were observed throughout the entirety of the research study. Prior to beginning the data collection process, the researcher ensured that the Board of UNICAF Research Ethics Committee (UREC) had given their necessary approval, as specified in the study's protocol. Following this, permission was sought in writing from the various institutions and individuals involved as participants in the study and Gatekeeper letters were prepared and submitted to the University on behalf of these institutions.

To protect the study participants, the researcher ensured that permission to conduct the research was first obtained through a consent form that was signed by participants. Further, the required forms made available by the University requesting the approval and consent of participants were prepared and signed prior to the interview process. Additionally, the researcher made sure that the data collected were secured, kept confidential, and kept anonymous under password protection. Participants are more likely to be truthful while answering the survey questions when they are assured of their secrecy (Stephens, 2007). Also, the researcher used codes and pseudonyms in addition to other techniques to store, retrieve, and discard the data throughout the research period.

The first section of this chapter discusses the implications of the research study where the discussion is centered around each research question and its related hypothesis, with the aim of arriving at logical interpretations and conclusions. In this segment, the researcher attempts to support all conclusions within the scope of the study with the actual research findings. This section also offers a discussion on the limitations of the study based on the responses of participants in relation to the literature and how these limitations may have affected the outcome of the results. Further, based on the literature and the relevant theories purported in the study, the researcher addresses the expectations of the study in comparison with the actual results and offer explanations for any inconsistencies.

The second section of this chapter closes with a summarized conclusion of the entire research study with specific emphasis on several broad areas such as the type of study with regards to the design and methodology; the research objectives; the results of the study in relation to the literature; the limitations of the study; recommendations for improvement; recommendations for future research; and finally, its significance of contribution to the body of literature and policy makers alike.

The third section of the chapter seeks to outline several detailed recommendations that policymakers within the Government of St Kitts and Nevis can apply to alleviate the many recurring problems of safety net programs while at the same time, help to mitigate the youth unemployment problem in the country. The final section of the chapter highlights several recommendations for future researchers to expand on the subject matter. Although there have been some improvements, there is still more to be done to provide effective social safety nets and public policy programs for the poor and vulnerable within small Caribbean economies.

To build the required systems for such projects, the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis and other comparable governments within the sub-region should cooperate. The international, regional, and national development communities must keep collaborating with these small island developing nations to solve the significant coverage and benefit gaps that still exist.

Future academics might draw on the findings of this study and the suggestions made to construct a strategy for governments within the region to successfully handle the problem of youth unemployment. At the conclusion of this research study, it is anticipated and envisioned that additional research will be pursued to address the understudied issues of youth unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis and other small-island economies in the Caribbean.

5.1 Implications

Research Question and Hypotheses

Main (RQ1): To what extent has the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) reduced the level of youth unemployment within the economy of St Kitts and Nevis?

Hypotheses

H1o: (null) The implementation of STEP has not resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

H1a: (alternative) The implementation of STEP has resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis.

The main research question in the study sought to determine the level of impact or contribution the STEP made in relation to youth unemployment within the Federation of St Kitts and Nevis. Thus, a logical approach to an answer for the main research question can best be examined against the objectives and main components of the STEP. From the responses of participants, STEP can be characterized as a government safety net program that was designed with the intention of reducing unemployment, while providing skills, training and empowerment to its beneficiaries. According to data from the World Bank (2018), social safety net programs helped an estimated 36% of the very poor avoid living in extreme poverty, demonstrating their significant contribution to the worldwide effort to eradicate poverty.

Based on the findings, there is an element of skills and aspects of training attached to the program. However, more than an approximate 75% of workers employed by STEP have not been able to move beyond the aspect of obtaining a weekly or monthly minimum wage payment.

From the results of the study, the researcher can therefore conclude that while the STEP has not lived up to its intended objectives of empowerment with a focus on adequate skills and certified training, it has in fact contributed to the reduction of unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis and this is primarily reflected in terms of job assistance, provision and maintenance on a short to medium term basis. The alternative hypothesis can therefore be confirmed for this research question.

RQ2: What are the most significant features of the STEP?

H1o (null): There are no significant features of STEP contributing to its success.

H1a (alternative): There are significant features of STEP that account for its success.

This research question sought to examine the significant features or components of the program that may or may not contribute to the program meeting its objectives. Many governments across the region and beyond are known for utilizing safety net programs to address similar issues like youth unemployment; hence the researcher is of the view that, when examining this important issue relating to the unemployment of youth, it is of critical importance to understand the purpose and thought process of the policy framers and policy makers in their quest to implement programs of this nature.

From all responses given in the study, the most significant features of the STEP program comprised the three key elements of skills, training and empowerment which are, in fact, the main objectives of the program. However, judging from the interns who were the intended beneficiaries of the program, many of them were dissatisfied with the quality of skills sets provided as well as their level of certification acquired. In addition, respondents were of the view that more focused training was required, and major concerns were raised with regards to their upward mobility of achieving permanent employment after a period of internship.

Similarly, organizers and stakeholders of the arrangement expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of soft skills, structured formal training, adequate certification and general program assessment. Based on these findings, the researcher can therefore conclude that these features of the STEP program, although significant in theory, did not in fact contribute to the program's success as they were not met to the required level or standard. In this regard, the null hypothesis for this research question holds true.

RQ3: To what extent is it easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment compared to those who are not?

H1o (null): It is not easier for people trained by STEP to obtain employment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a (alternative): It is easier for STEP trainees to obtain employment in St Kitts and Nevis.

This research question looked critically at a very important aspect of the program – training. As a primarily training program, the researcher sought to make a comparison of persons exposed to the training offered by STEP and those who have not been trained by STEP to determine any advantages or differences between both groups of people with regards to employment. From the perspective of the community and the public at large, this research question would also serve to measure the social reach and impact of the program.

From an assessment of the responses received to this question, the researcher was of the view that there was a prevailing perspective among the public that the STEP program was a handout for persons who needed a job. Many persons saw the program as one that offered menial job positions like grass-cutting and cleaning. The responses of participants involved with the STEP pointed to the fact that this was a government program that was propelled by political affiliation and favoritism. Negative attitudes of interns and issues of absenteeism from work were phrases mainly used to describe the characteristics of the program. The stigma and negativism associated with the program led to ethical implications surrounding the same.

From the perspective of unemployed youth who were not associated with STEP, some felt the program was an opportunity to reduce unemployment, while others saw it as a skills/training program and others as a job assistance for youth. Notably their ratings of the program included the more popular responses such as a benefit to the economy; a benefit to people/students; and a harder time obtaining a job without STEP.

Overall, with respect to research question three, the findings suggested to the researcher that the STEP program was not a highly regarded and sought-after accomplishment but rather a means to an end. As such, it can be concluded that, other than obtaining a paycheck, there were no major perks or advantages to persons obtaining employment under the STEP program as opposed to those who were not associated with the program.

In this regard and in response to this research question, the null hypothesis appears to hold true.

RQ4: What economic impact in St Kitts and Nevis has STEP made as a result of its activities?

H1o (null): The activities of STEP have not resulted in any economic impact for St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a (alternative): The activities of STEP have resulted in economic impact for St Kitts and Nevis.

The fourth research question measured the activities of the program against the economic impact on the citizens of the country. It allowed for an in-depth examination of the activities and engagement of the interns involved in the STEP to ascertain the results of their achievements and its correlation toward the improvement of the economy.

This research question sought to find an answer in relation to the prior state of the economy of St Kitts and Nevis before the implementation of the STEP, in comparison to the state of the economy post-STEP implementation. Evidence from the study points to the fact that the program provided jobs for approximately 7 percent of the entire population, contributing to the country's GDP.

Additionally, particularly during the highs of COVID-19, the STEP kept many private businesses afloat by subsidizing a substantial portion of their wage bill in relation to STEP workers. As such, higher and more productive occupations are created, which increases earnings and funds social protection, which boosts population productivity and employability in addition to resulting in better and more stable household incomes. The sustainability of social protection depends on economic growth and how it affects the amount and quality of jobs. Considering these benefits, the researcher can therefore conclude that the impact on the economy was a substantial one in support of the alternative hypothesis.

RQ5: What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP?

H1o (null): There are no opportunities to improve the current design of the STEP program in St. Kitts and Nevis.

H1a (alternative): There are opportunities available to improve the current design of STEP in St Kitts and Nevis.

The final research question looked at the overall design of the program and possible recommendations for improvements. This question addressed the structure, management and operation of the program to include how the program is monitored, measured, and evaluated against its intended objectives. Based on the findings emanating from the study, an examination of the current operation of the program allowed the researcher to provide insights and recommendations.

This research question yielded several responses from all stakeholders in the STEP arrangement. The findings revealed, among other things, the need for the organizers to implement a proper structure of the program with clear roles and responsibilities for all parties. It was felt that such a program required a visionary to focus on achieving the intended objectives including the skills training aspect and matching the right people with the right skill sets to improve the economy. Respondents felt that the program must ensure a measurable training component where participants are qualified and certified in their various fields as they work

closely with the private sector employers. Other responses included the removal of politics and favoritism, the implementation of the revolving door policy for interns to move upward to permanent employment, and sensitization of the program and its benefits to the general populace.

As such, based on these responses to this research question, the researcher concluded that the answer to this lies in the alternative hypothesis as outlined above.

5.1.1 Limitations and Response to Study based on the Literature

During the study, the researcher encountered the following limitations. Firstly, during the period of data collection, there were some inconsistencies of numbers recorded by the main office of the STEP located in St Kitts and that of its subsidiary office in Nevis.

Secondly, no employer agents were included in the interviews; the researcher was unable to get their first-hand perspective as one of the stakeholders in the STEP program arrangement. Although interns expressed their sentiments toward their employers, there was no empirical evidence gathered from the employers themselves, which may have impacted the results and outcome of the study in some way.

A third limitation of the study related to the questionnaire instrument used in the second stage of the data gathering process. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 150 participants; however, due to incorrect email addresses and obsolete contact information received for some participants, a total of 119 responded. Some participants also opted not to respond.

Another limitation encountered occurred at the time of data collection, when a respondent from the STEP management team informed the researcher that specific data regarding the category of skill sets acquired by the interns was not yet available. This information was an essential piece of data which the researcher intended to utilize in the computation of the precise impact made by the STEP in the category of skills acquirement.

Additionally, data from the St Kitts – Nevis Labor Survey was only available up to 2018 while the comparative data from STEP was more current. Similarly, at the time of data collection, due to a lack of recorded data, the researcher was again unable to obtain from the STEP office an accurate figure with regards to the number of persons who have become entrepreneurs, because of the STEP.

To describe how the results respond to the problem of youth unemployment through government's intervention of safety net programs, the researcher sought to compare these findings against stated theories such like the job-search theory and the labor-market theory outlined in the literature. According to McCall, (1970) and Mortensen, (1970), the job-search theory relates to the strategy of job-search for youthful workers with lesser capabilities. This hypothesis predicts that the increased rate of unemployment among youth directly relates to a high recurrence of joblessness among that populace. While the evidence of this theory holds true for the majority of STEP interns who had not acquired a high level of education and were unskilled and untrained at the time of employment; on the other hand, there was no evidence of a high recurrence of joblessness among that population as the program provided consistent steady employment.

With regards to the labor search, the advancement of the “matching function” stands out as being possibly the foremost essential development in job search hypothesis. The findings reveal that this element of matching the right person with the right skill sets was one of the main issues that may have hindered the further advancement of the STEP program. It is noteworthy that this ‘skills mismatch’ theoretical framework of youth unemployment and the economy of St Kitts and Nevis has been similarly employed in the majority of research studies conducted in Caribbean countries, where the findings suggest that lack of aptitude, inexperience and lack of information are all contributing factors towards the high level of youth unemployment, resulting in uncertified laborers (Downes, 2006). UNECLAC (2005) concurs with this hypothesis of mismatch referring to the fact that laborers do not have the right skills that are required.

Likewise, the findings emanating from the STEP interviews and questionnaire surveys are similar in keeping with the expectations of this theory. Many of the interns lacked both hard and soft skills for the work environment.

As outlined in the literature review, one of the important criteria of the skills mismatch theory is that of *allocative effectiveness*, which suggests that each laborer ought to be utilized within the occupation to which he is most suited. Again, evidence of this trait is reflected under the broad theme of 'training' in relation to the data received from interns. Many respondents indicated that they were placed in positions of work where they had little desire and knowledge to function effectively and as such, this concept holds true in light of this particular study.

Yet, another criterion in the literature on which the mismatch theory hinges is *full employment*, which suggests the readiness of each laborer to work at the current wage paid to individuals of comparable capacities. While interns benefitted from a paycheck and the learning of skills, the objective of gaining permanent employment for upward mobility and advancement, in most cases, was not being met. The ability for interns to transfer from STEP to permanent job positions was difficult. There was resistance and reluctance from much of the private sector who remained unwilling to promote or graduate interns to permanent employment on their payroll. Additionally, some interns expressed concern and dissatisfaction with their minimum wage in exchange for long hours of labor. In this aspect, there appears to be some contradiction with what the theory states versus the expectation of the interns on the STEP program.

Another interesting and relevant theory purported by Qun Zeng (2012) and found in the literature is that of unemployment deprivation within the context of social relationship exclusion. Perri (2004), is of the view that supportive social networks and institutions can help people avoid poverty and unemployment by cultivating a "network of opportunity" that can help people discover more social resources.

His research lends credence to the claim that government-sponsored training and internship programs like STEP can cause trainees to identify as unemployed, which may exacerbate internal communication and lead to social isolation.

According to Meijers and Riele (2004) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1999), governments can provide training for young people who are unemployed to help them become more employable while also connecting them with firms who work with the employed population. This will assist in creating integrated social systems where the unemployed group may build their social networks and learn more about available openings, increasing their chances of finding employment quickly. Clearly, from an evaluation of the study's findings, some evidence of this theory was seen with some shortcomings. While on one hand, the STEP provided that 'network of opportunity' for the unemployed; this opportunity, for the most part, did not transcend 'to increase early employment possibilities' of permanent employment as was intended.

The existing rules and regulations governing labor markets in the Caribbean present major challenges as it relates to youth unemployment and this is qualified by such factors as inadequate labor market information, low levels of labor productivity and the mismatch between skills and jobs. Indeed, during the study, the researcher experienced some difficulty in obtaining labor market information as some of the data had not been collated at the time of research and as a result, was not available. In the context of St. Kitts and Nevis, there was no access to recent employment data with 2016 being the last set of figures recorded. Similarly, the findings revealed low levels of productivity in cases where the program suffered high levels of absenteeism and a lack of skill sets for certain jobs. As such, these occurrences in the study are in keeping with expectations based on the literature from previous research (Kandil et al, 2014).

5.1.2 *Expectations, Explanations and Implications*

Within this study, a review and examination of the literature sought to address the subject of youth unemployment and its related concepts and theories such as productivity, job-search, labor market, behavioral public administration and social relationship exclusion. Using the Skills Training and Empowerment Program (STEP) as the dependent variable against youth unemployment as the independent variable, themes relating to the social and economic impact of the economy because of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors were also discussed in the literature.

The justification for the use of these theories was based not only on the nature of the STEP research investigation, but the similarities of their “matching” concept and the fact that these theories are relevant to explain, from different perspectives, the social phenomenon of youth unemployment within the context of a particular society. Hinging on the two broad concepts of allocative effectiveness and full employment described in the labor market theory, the aim of the researcher was therefore to apply the matching traits of the labor force and its characteristics with the real or perceived success of STEP: a Skills, Training and Empowerment safety net Program for the youth in St Kitts-Nevis.

Notwithstanding the expectations outlined above, the findings of the study met some of these expectations and refuted some. For example, in the case of providing employment for many persons, by nature of the STEP, as a government safety net program, this expectation was met. On the other hand, as outlined earlier, the acquisition of soft skills and proper certification for the upward mobility of interns were not met.

Within the context of the literature about government’s implementation of safety net programs to mitigate youth unemployment, this study is of critical importance, not only to St Kitts and Nevis, but to similar small-island Caribbean economies like Antigua and Saint Lucia.

In recent times, particularly with the onslaught of COVID-19, labor markets within the Caribbean now face significant challenges with the constant deterioration of the global outlook increasing since 2020. The first time since the 1970s that high inflation and slow growth have occurred together has been brought on by rising geopolitical tensions, the conflict in Ukraine, an unequal epidemic recovery, and persisting supply chain constraints.

The challenging compromise that decision-makers must make is to address excessive inflation at a time when the job recovery is still in its early stages. Most countries still haven't reached the employment and labor-hour levels they did at the end of 2019, when the COVID-19 health crisis first started. In the absence of commensurate rises in labor salaries, the cost-of-living problem instantly jeopardizes household livelihoods and has the potential to reduce aggregate demand. Funding for youth employment programs has quickly increased amid all this ambiguity. There is, however, scant empirical proof that these interventions boost the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainability and income growth in emerging economies. There is also little to no proof that these youth employment initiatives contribute to peace and stability or provide young people with a more generalized influence.

For instance, to determine if the nation's social assistance programs were helping households overcome their poverty and manage their vulnerabilities and risks, a Social Safety Net Assessment (SSNA) was conducted for Saint Lucia in 2009. This Assessment highlighted that "Saint Lucia faces significant challenges in ensuring an adequate safety net in the face of economic and environmental pressures and the changing social landscape", (Blank, 2010). Numerous social protection initiatives are in place in Saint Lucia to address serious vulnerabilities. However, the 2009 SSNA confirmed that the pertinent interventions and agencies experience a variety of limitations and struggle to adequately safeguard the most vulnerable and underprivileged from the numerous threats they are exposed to.

Similarly, the One Stop Employment Centre (OSEC) is a public employment service in Antigua that offers free support to job seekers and employers, including monthly workshops, computer training, career counselling and, through the Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Programme (ABSTEP), also provides temporary work and training opportunities in communities and government departments. However, data on the programme's beneficiaries is not available, although anecdotal information suggests that each phase reaches around 100 direct beneficiaries.

The political environment and the administrative capabilities in specific country contexts have a significant impact on the capacity of safety nets to reach the truly poor and vulnerable. This highlights the significance of assessing safety net investments in the broader context of social policy, without diminishing the significant role that safety nets can play as transitional tools. As such, from the findings of this study, and the recommendations put forth, future researchers can build on this to create a model for small island developing governments to effectively address the issue of youth unemployment.

5.2 Conclusions

For this investigation, the researcher conducted exploratory research within a sequential mixed methods design approach known as triangulation, that involved qualitative and quantitative data mixed inside a single study, with their strengths complementing each other. The study combined the elements of primary and secondary research to investigate and analyze the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) launched by the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis to determine the extent of its impact on the reduction of youth unemployment on the economy, as a direct result of its implementation.

The study utilized face to face interviews and on-line questionnaires to gather data from 150 participants across St Kitts and Nevis to answer the main research question: To what extent has STEP reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis. The findings were displayed using tables, bar charts and graphs and revealed that, although the STEP did not fully meet its intended objectives, this public policy program implemented by the Government

contributed positively toward an approximate 75% reduction in the level of unemployment that existed in St Kitts and Nevis prior to its implementation; albeit a large percentage of this reduction did not affect the youth population as it was intended.

The study design was one of association and correlation where two linear related variables moved in relation to one another. The two main variables identified were the STEP program (independent) and the youth unemployment rate (dependent). The types or nature of the variables used in the study comprised ordinal, dichotomous and multinominal. However, the measurement of both variables was ordinal.

With regards to sampling procedures, the researcher utilized purposive sampling for the collection of qualitative data where a critical case sampling technique was employed. On the other hand, a stratified random sampling method was adopted for the sequential phase of quantitative data collection where a different sample set was employed based on gender and age range. Within the context of an exploratory sequential design approach, and to eliminate the possibility of sampling bias, the researcher selected a parallel relationship pertaining to both sample sets.

The instruments of research used to gather the qualitative data were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The recommended software Taguette, was used by the researcher to determine realities and presumptions associated with the basic reasons for this phenomenon of youth unemployment. From the quantitative aspect, two types of questionnaires were designed as the instrument to extract data from another sample of STEP interns and unemployed youth. From these, measurable information was accumulated and assessed utilizing SPSS. From the results of the qualitative data, five primary constructs (perspective, skills, training, empowerment and impact), associated with the STEP program were highlighted and measured against the concept of youth unemployment.

1. *Perspective* – the views held by stakeholders in relation to the STEP
2. *Skills* – the level and importance of the skills sets acquired by STEP interns
3. *Training* – the frequency and quality of training provided to STEP interns

4. *Empowerment* – the ability of STEP interns to achieve this component of the program by gaining permanent employment or becoming entrepreneurs
5. *Impact* – the level of STEP’s contribution toward the reduction of youth unemployment and the economy

Statistical tests were employed in the quantitative phase of the study. These included descriptive statistics used by the researcher to generate reports, graphs, plots and trend lines based on data analyses. In the study, the researcher utilized central tendency to analyze the frequency of data points in the distribution to reflect the mean, median, or mode, which measures the most common patterns of the analyzed data set. From the data obtained, examinations and assessments were made of elevated levels of youth unemployment prior to and post-STEP implementation.

Additionally, Pearson correlation and Spearman rank correlation tests were used to: (a) determine whether an association or correlation between the two main variables exists; and (b) if such an association or correlation does exist, measure the strength and direction of the association/correlation. From the Pearson correlation test conducted between the rate of youth unemployment and the success rate of STEP, the findings revealed there was a relationship of 0.234 that existed between the two variables. Similarly, a test of Spearman’s correlation rank, using the same variables revealed a 0.274 correlation.

The researcher also conducted two Chi-square tests. The purpose of this test was to determine a difference between observed data and expected data due to a relationship between the variables of employability and unemployment being studied. The first was done in relation to the STEP interns and revealed a 96% result of the cells with an expected count less than 5. In other words, only 4% of the cells have an expected count larger than 5. With the minimum expected count being 0.07, this means even in the cells with the fewest expected occurrences, a very small fraction of occurrence is expected.

Similarly, the second test was done in relation to the unemployed youth and revealed an 85% result of all the cells that fall into the category of less than 5. Notably, when the expected count is less than 5, it is an indication to statisticians that the reliability of the findings may be compromised due to small sample sizes.

The main aim of the research was to acknowledge or refute the hypothesis that the implementation of the STEP safety net program by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis resulted in the reduction of youth unemployment; thereby contributing to the well-being of the economy. This study sought to find viable solutions to this long-standing problem of youth unemployment within St Kitts and Nevis. This was accomplished through several research objectives outlined by the researcher which included the need to determine the most significant features of the STEP that attributed to its perceived success; to determine the extent to which young interns of STEP have increased their chances for employment compared to those who have not participated in the program; to examine the economic activities of the program to determine which have a greater impact; and to discover opportunities and suggestions for a better policy design.

In the researcher's opinion, the research objectives were met, and each was measured against a particular research question. From the main research question, concerning the extent of the impact of STEP on youth unemployment, the researcher discovered that while the STEP had not lived up to its intended objectives of empowerment with a focus on adequate skills and certified training, it had in fact contributed to the reduction of unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis and this was primarily reflected in terms of job assistance, provision and maintenance on a short to medium term basis.

Following the implementation of STEP, and during its operation over a three-year period, jobs were made available to an excess of 3,500 persons which equates to approximately seven percent of the entire population of 50,000. For research question two, which addressed the significant features of the STEP, the researcher concluded that these features of the program, which were primarily skills, training and empowerment, although significant in theory, did not

in fact contribute to this aspect of the program's objectives and overall success as they were not met to the required level or standard. Based on research question three which sought to determine whether trainees of STEP were easier to gain employment status than those who were not, the findings suggested that the program was not a highly regarded and sought-after accomplishment, but rather a means to an end. As such, other than obtaining a paycheck, there were no major perks or advantages to persons obtaining employment under the STEP program as opposed to those who were not associated with the program.

In terms of the economic impact as portrayed by research question four, the researcher concluded that the impact on the economy was a substantial one. Evidence from the study points to the fact that the program not only provided jobs for approximately 7 per cent of the country's entire population, but also made a huge contribution to the private sector in terms of its annual assistance towards a wage bill of EC\$4 million for over 600 private businesses; that benefitted from this safety net program, thereby contributing to the country's GDP.

With regards to opportunities for improvement of the program as examined by Research Question five, the study yielded several detailed responses from all stakeholders in the STEP arrangement (except for the employers); ranging from a proper structure of the program to a measurable training component to the removal of politics and favoritism; just to name a few.

The findings of the study generally suggested to the researcher that the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) made a substantial level of contribution and considerable impact toward employment reduction in St Kitts and Nevis. However, from a deeper analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data acquired from the sample selection, the researcher concluded that the STEP was unable to fulfill most of its intended objectives, particularly in the provision of skills, training and empowerment. While many interns were able to acquire skills, there was no proper structure in place by the management of STEP to measure and assess these skill sets and their impact on the economy of St Kitts and Nevis. Additionally, while STEP provided work for approximately 4,000 individuals throughout St Kitts and Nevis, approximately 75% of that number did not constitute the youth population between the ages of

18 to 35. Hence, while a reduction was made in unemployment, a small percentage of this reduction related to the youth.

With respect to the type of skills achieved, many of the interns were lacking this important trait needed for the world of work. The findings suggested that this element of matching the right person with the right skill sets was one of the main issues that may have hindered the further advancement of the STEP program. The program did not ensure a measurable training component where participants were properly assessed in their various fields.

Further, while interns benefitted from a paycheck and the learning of skills, the objective of empowerment through gainful permanent employment for upward mobility and advancement, in most cases, were not met. While there were few suggestions of interns who were able to gain permanent employment or engage in entrepreneurship, there was no documented evidence to show that most participants within the program were able to move beyond temporary employment and the receipt of a weekly or monthly wage to succeed to that level of empowerment.

Throughout the study, the issue of youth unemployment within the economy of St Kitts and Nevis was linked to several theories of productivity, job creation, economic growth and behavioral public administration. The scope of the literature review spanned a period of seven to ten years from 2011 to 2021, utilizing a wide selection of journals, research papers and peer-reviewed articles. The first section of the literature review was used to identify and establish the theoretical and conceptual framework on which the research study was built. The researcher presented a balanced view of the historical and current literature on the subject matter and portrayed theorists that provided a rationale for the selection of the framework. A review of the literature carefully examined the subject of youth unemployment under six main themes, *Productivity, Job-search, Labor Market, Social Relationship Exclusion, Social impact and Economic impact*; all highlighting various concepts such as *skills mismatch, allocative effectiveness, full employment and social isolation* under relevant headings. In the literature,

the researcher also reviewed similar government-implemented safety net programs within five other Caribbean islands as a comparison to St Kitts and Nevis and discussed the context of safety net programs against the standard of public policy programs in the Caribbean.

With regards to the main Research Question, the theory in relation to behavioral public administration, as purported by Herbert Simon (1947), must pay special attention to public service values, such as democratic participation, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, governance ethics, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. From an examination of the findings emanating from the STEP, in terms of the behavior and attitude of the stakeholders involved in the program, we see evidence of the majority of these traits lacking which calls for a demand of policymakers and practitioners within government to employ alternative approaches to policy design and implementation. However, in keeping with the job-search theory relating to that same Research Question one, the assumption can be made that as a result of the government's implementation of STEP in the Federation of St Kitts and Nevis, the difficulty of obtaining a job for some of the youth was minimized.

For Research Question two, the findings revealed that this element of matching the right person with the right skill sets was one of the main issues that may have hindered the further advancement of the STEP program. According to the literature, the existing rules and regulations governing labor markets in the Caribbean present major challenges as it relates to youth unemployment and this is qualified by such factors as inadequate labor market information, low levels of labor productivity and the mismatch between skills and jobs. Similarly, the findings of the study revealed low levels of productivity in cases where the STEP program suffered high levels of absenteeism and a lack of skill sets for certain jobs.

With regards to Research Question three, interns benefitted from a paycheck and the learning of skills; however, the objective of gaining permanent employment for upward mobility and advancement, in most cases, were not met. From an evaluation of the study's findings for Research Question four, some evidence of Perri's (2004) theory is seen, who claimed that good social systems and networks can provide emotional and financial support

and cultivate the ‘network of opportunity’ that can reveal more social assets and eventually help individuals shake off destitution and unemployment.

Some limitations of the study were noted which included the unavailability and sometimes inconsistency of specific data, a decrease in respondents to the questionnaires due to incorrect contact information and the inadvertent omission of employer agents by the researcher during the data collection process. The study also revealed areas of weakness in relation to data obtained from the St Kitts – Nevis Labor Survey which was only available up to 2018 while the comparative data from STEP was more current (2021). Similarly, at the time of data collection, due to a lack of recorded data, the researcher was again unable to obtain from the STEP office, an accurate figure with regards to the number of persons who had obtained permanent employment or become entrepreneurs because of the program.

The study offered several recommendations for the improvement of safety net programs like STEP for the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and similar small-island governments. These included, but were not limited to, the need to implement a proper structure of the program with clear roles and responsibilities outlined for all parties; a visionary to champion the cause and remain focused without political interference; and the issue of proper orientation to address the expectations of both the employer agents and interns at the inception of the internship. Based on these findings, the researcher purported seven key recommendations for the action of this government-initiated program.

1. *Design and Focus*: this type of training program should be designed for what it was intended: an internship program void of political tribalism for school leavers and the unemployed to prepare and empower them for the labor force.
2. *Market Orientation*: an orientation process of all stakeholders should be instituted at the outset, to address the attitude and mindset of all persons coming into the program; and sensitization of the program to the public to remove the biasness and stigmatism associated

with the program and what it offers. Also, due to COVID-19 pandemic, there are other needs within the firms, such as the digital transformation, which is a great opportunity for the programme, to train the youth in these new digital competences to increase their employability at the time that it will boost the digital transformation in firms. In addition, this would change the usefulness perception of the programme by the benefited firms receiving the interns.

3. *Graduation of Interns*: the process whereby interns graduate from what should be a temporary internship program to full or permanent employment should not exceed a 3- year maximum time limit.
4. *Qualification Status*: based on the findings, the current qualifications attached to the training program should be upgraded from a NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) to a CVQ (Caribbean Vocational Qualification); which is in fact a more marketable qualification.
5. *Monitoring and Evaluation*: adequate oversight is required at all levels to ensure objectives are met and that interns graduate from the program with the necessary skill sets required for the world of work.
6. *Collaborative Partnership*: the study revealed that the success of a public policy program such as STEP requires the collaborative effort of government as well as the private sector and other stakeholders.
7. *Database Access*: a central database should be established by the government where data is constantly updated and readily accessible for an assessment of such programs.

Given the results obtained, it is highly recommended to expand the evaluation of the programme to other qualitative aspects which were identified as significant determinants of the results. In this way, further study of intergovernmental relations is recommended because this has a direct impact on the programme implementation. The research must also explore possible changes in the scheme of collaboration from the implicated: public, private, and nonprofit sectors. In addition, it is highly recommended that further analysis of the competencies demanded by the labor market be done, as these have been changed after COVID-19, and this is a great opportunity for the government to create different competences for the trainees, answering to the market demands, at the time that the employability is expanded.

Additionally, the study afforded recommendations for future researchers. The opportunity for future research could seek to expand on youth unemployment and social safety nets to involve a comparison of multiple programs of this nature across more countries over longer periods. Future studies on this issue of the impact of public policy programs on youth unemployment may consider utilizing comparable data with a comparative angle to enrich the understanding of outcomes among similar small island developing states. Such research can also provide valuable insight and direction for public policy reforms within the region.

5.2.1 Significance of Contribution

This original study contributes to the body of empirical literature on active labor market policies and how they operate within small open economies of developing countries. The investigation highlights a case of a public policy program (STEP) implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis to propose and recommend a model associated with the behavioral public administration approach theory for unemployed youth to gain permanent and sustainable employment.

From the conclusion of this dissertation, it is expected and envisioned that this study would initiate further research to address the under-investigated areas of youth unemployment within St Kitts and Nevis and similar small-island economies within the Caribbean region. Steps should therefore be taken by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and other similar governments within the sub-region to work together to establish the necessary systems for such initiatives.

While this study has contributed to research and the body of literature, despite some progress, much more needs to be done regarding social safety nets programs for the poor and vulnerable within the Caribbean region. Significant gaps in coverage and benefit levels remain, and the international, regional and national development community needs to continue working with such countries to address these disparities. The current social welfare systems are financially unviable and not designed to handle the poverty and unemployment brought on by the shift to the market, with many of them being run by public businesses rather than by the federal government.

Naturally, this makes it more challenging for governments to offer efficient safety nets. The universal system of social welfare benefits, like monetary allowances, can be tailored to particularly vulnerable groups, like children in big families, while focusing programs on high-unemployment areas where social funds or public works might reduce detrimental social assistance effects.

Notwithstanding, from the findings of this case study, and the recommendations put forth, it is the researcher's hope that future researchers can build and expand on this initial contribution to the literature to create a sustainable model for small island developing governments to successfully use public policy programs to effectively address the issue of youth unemployment.

5.3 Recommendations for application

The recommendations put forth in this research study are based primarily on research questions 1 and 5 which respectively address the origin, intent and objectives of this public policy program against the actual implementation of the program, its shortcomings and areas for improvement.

Main Research Question - RQ1: *To what extent has the Skills Training*

Empowerment Program (STEP) reduced the level of youth unemployment in St Kitts and Nevis?

RQ5: *What opportunities are there to improve the current design of the STEP?*

From the above research questions, the findings emanating from the interviews and questionnaires yielded the following results. These included, but were not limited to, the need to implement a proper structure of the program with clear roles and responsibilities outlined for all parties; a visionary to champion the cause and remain focused without political interference; the issue of proper orientation to address the expectations of both the employer agents and interns at the inception of the internship.

Thus, from an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data from the sample, the researcher concluded that the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) was unable to fulfill all its intended objectives, particularly in the provision of skills, training and empowerment. While many interns were able to acquire skills, there was no proper structure in place by the management of STEP to measure and assess these skill sets and their impact

on the economy. Additionally, while STEP provided work for approximately 4,000 persons, approximately 75% did not constitute the youth population between the ages of 18 to 35. Hence, while a reduction was made to unemployment, a small percentage of this reduction related to youth.

With respect to the type of skills achieved, respondents were of the view that measures are needed to improve the soft skills component as many of the interns are lacking this important trait needed for the world of work. Government officials felt that there was an urgent need to focus more on the skills training aspect of the program to match the right persons with the right skill sets to improve the economy. The findings revealed that this element of matching the right person with the right skill sets was one of the main issues that may have hindered the further advancement of the STEP program. Respondents felt that the program must ensure a measurable training component where participants are assessed in their various fields as they work closely with the private sector employers. Respondents were also of the view that there were misunderstandings and misconceptions of STEP with regards to the general populace in St Kitts and Nevis; and that sensitization of the program to the public will assist in a change of mindsets. While interns benefitted from a paycheck and the learning of skills, the objective of empowerment through gainful permanent employment for upward mobility and advancement, in most cases, was not met.

As such, based on these findings, the researcher suggests the following recommendations with regards to the structure and management, as well as the implementation and assessment of this public policy program:

1. **Design and Focus:** This type of training program should be designed for what it was intended: an internship program for school leavers and the unemployed to prepare and empower them for the labor force. Data from the office of the Labor Commissioner in St. Kitts and Nevis has revealed that out of every 10 students who leave school, only 2 are placed. As such, the selection process of interns should be screened to accommodate and reflect transparency and accountability within the

system, by catering for those who really meet the criteria. Currently, there is the usual tendency for government safety net programs to lean towards favoritism and political bias for supporters of the ruling political party, which in turn have negative repercussions on the government's advancement of programs of this nature. From examples of countries like Taiwan and Australia, and similar Caribbean countries like St Lucia, studies have revealed that the focus of this public policy investment should be on skills training as the growing demand ratio of academics to skills across the Caribbean is 10% to 60% respectively. This type of focus is required to drive the economy of St Kitts and Nevis, particularly in a post-COVID era, where the demand for skills is not adequately met.

This 'skills mismatch' theoretical framework of youth unemployment and the economy of St Kitts and Nevis has been similarly employed in the majority of research studies conducted in Caribbean countries, where the findings suggest that lack of aptitude, inexperience and lack of information are all contributing factors towards the high level of youth unemployment, resulting in uncertified laborers (Downes, 2006).

One of the main themes common throughout the study was that of perspective where the views of various stakeholders in the program were compared and examined. The researcher strongly recommends that a real traineeship perspective must be taken by both employers and interns alike, responding to the firm's needs, in a way that the trainees could become more knowledgeable and valuable to the firms. The evidence from the study suggested that many of the interns were disregarded and treated as workers providing free labor rather than trainees on an internship program. Hence, the STEP program can make a much larger impact on the economy by advancing from a mere "assistance program" to a real "training program" as it was designed to be.

- 2 **Market Orientation:** There is an urgent need for market orientation. As it currently stands, the findings reveal a high degree of complacency and dependency inherent

within the program, resulting in expectations created among the beneficiaries of the program, which are not properly managed. Workers enter the program with pre-conceived ideas of what the program requires, and private employers have their own opinions of their role in the partnership arrangement with the government. Additionally, the public has their own warped perception of this government initiative. To address this issue,

- an Orientation process of all stakeholders should be instituted at the outset, to address the attitude and mindset of all persons coming into the program;
- sensitization of the program to the public to remove the political biasness and stigmatism associated with the program and what it offers.

3. **Graduation of Interns:** The process whereby interns graduate from what should be a temporary internship program to full or permanent employment should not exceed a 3-year maximum time limit. The findings have revealed interns who remain on the program indefinitely, which hinders their upward mobility and the access of other unemployed school leavers to the program, altogether defeating the objective of job empowerment.

To address the obvious issue of entitlement of interns, it is recommended that the mandate for the revolving door policy be enforced, and the age of engagement be capped with no place for retirees. There should be a systematic way of graduating people from the program to identify those who really should benefit from such an initiative.

4. **Qualification Status:** One of the key recommendations, based on the findings, is that the current qualifications attached to the training program be upgraded from a NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) to a CVQ (Caribbean Vocational Qualification).

As such, interns who successfully complete the training and are awarded with a CVQ will become more marketable for jobs across the Caribbean instead of being limited with a qualification at a national level.

5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The aspect of monitoring and evaluation is a very critical and important step in measuring the impact of social safety net programs. In the case of St Kitts and Nevis this will ensure that persons for which the program was created are the ones who would benefit from the program. Adequate oversight is required at all levels to ensure objectives are met and that interns graduate from the program with the necessary skill sets required for the world of work. Evidence from the study suggests that there was a lack of human resources (field workers and officers) to engage in regular monitoring of interns resulting in absenteeism and unethical work behavior. Hence, a robust monitoring and evaluation system will ensure sustainability of the program and that the success of the program is accurately measured against its intended objectives.

An important and recommended tool for the assessment and evaluation of the STEP program is an independent audit. The government should employ an audit team to review the program bi-annually to enhance accountability and transparency. This tool will assist the government in identifying the trainees available for job positions in the labor market and the various skill sets acquired, among other things. This will also help to eliminate wastage and address inconsistencies and irregularities within the program. The findings revealed that an audit of this nature commenced in St Kitts during the month of March 2021 and lasted until July 2021.

6. **Collaborative Partnership:** The study revealed that the success of a public policy program such as STEP requires the collaborative effort of government as well as the private sector. While there was evidence from the study of partnerships that existed among private employers, training institutions and the government, this relationship must be strengthened and maximized so that all stakeholders can truly benefit. One way to address this issue is through a period of orientation and signed documentation among all stakeholders.

7. Database Access: One of the difficulties encountered during the study was the ability of the researcher to readily obtain the required data to properly assess the beneficiaries of the program. It is therefore recommended that a central database be established by the government where data is constantly updated and readily accessible for an assessment of such programs.

In terms of the literature, employment readiness and the expansion of academic public policy programs are not sufficient indicators of success or importance. Although the field has had many unquestionable successes in terms of popularity, it has had less success in offering long-term answers to several policy issues, including campaign financing, homelessness, sustainable development, health care, poverty reduction and youth unemployment, to name a few. The pursuit of common-interest solutions to societal issues needs to be prioritized by public policy practitioners. This can be accomplished by adhering more closely to the ideas and guidelines that Harold Lasswell (1971) promoted more than 50 years ago, under the umbrella of the "policy sciences."

Additionally, those responsible for the successful implementation of public policy programs must modify their plans to reflect the ever-evolving environment we live in. Public policy initiatives such as the STEP must work to improve their own efficacy as well as their relevance to the outside world if they are to survive and grow in the future. These programs must evaluate and modify their curricula in response to how the world is changing.

According to S. T. Wang (2021), all poverty alleviation policies were estimated to alleviate 4.6% of poverty in Taiwan in 2021. In rural areas, China initiated the *Targeted Poverty Alleviation* program in 2013 to alleviate absolute poverty by 2020. The Saint Lucian government has started a series of reforms to achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction, including the completion of the National Social Protection Policy to guarantee inclusive and equitable sustainable development in Saint Lucia.

While the National Planning Framework is being finalized and has explicit suggestions for greening the economy, a National Vision Commission has also been established to determine the country's long-term development goals.

However, despite these strides, the existing rules and regulations governing labor markets in the Caribbean present major challenges as it relates to youth unemployment and this is qualified by such factors as inadequate labor market information, low levels of labor productivity and the mismatch between skills and jobs. Indeed, during the study, the researcher experienced some difficulty in obtaining labor market information as some of the data had not been collated at the time of research and as a result, was not available. Similarly, the findings revealed low levels of productivity in cases where the program suffered high levels of absenteeism and a lack of skill sets for certain jobs.

Notwithstanding these issues among public policy programs across the Caribbean, the researcher is of the view that the above recommendations, purposefully implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and similar Caribbean governments, would alleviate many of the recurring problems associated with public policy programs like STEP.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

5.4.1 Public policy/ safety net programs within the Caribbean

The issue with modern public policy/ safety net programs is that they have deviated too much from the founding fathers of the discipline's initial goal. To advance universal human dignity, public policy was established based on problem-oriented, contextual, multi- method investigation. The primary goal of the policy practitioner is to enhance the standard of decision-making (Lasswell, 1971). According to the policy sciences, the effectiveness of a choice is determined not by how closely it adheres to theory, employs particular methodology, or achieves predetermined goals, but rather by how much it benefits citizens.

From an examination of the safety net program STEP implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and the findings emanating from the study, the researcher believes that two prominent themes must be addressed for public policy to be both effective and relevant in the 21st century, given the challenges it currently faces. First, by adopting the objectives and tenets promoted by Harold Lasswell more than 50 years ago under the banner of the "policy sciences," public policy practitioners and lawmakers need to dedicate themselves more firmly to finding answers to social problems in society that serve the common good. Second, programs must be continuously modified to reflect the ever-evolving environment in which we live. Introducing new programs would also help overcome the problems of the second task even more effectively than the first. Considering this, the following recommendations of the researcher are outlined hereunder and categorized accordingly.

5.5 Recommendations for future research by policy makers in Government

1. A Greater Emphasis on Intergovernmental Relations:

In recent decades, intergovernmental initiatives for welfare, healthcare, environmental protection and youth unemployment have expanded significantly. Understanding the effectiveness of our current and future projects requires an interagency perspective (Conlan, 1998; Goggin et al., 1990). Intergovernmental relations must therefore receive more attention as governments across the Caribbean region strategically work together to combat these similar prevailing issues within their economies.

2. A Collaboration of Public, Private, and Nonprofit Sectors:

The conventional distinctions between the citizen, nonprofit, private, and public sectors are growing hazy. In a world where policymaking is decentralized and devolved, there is a growing understanding that all sectors should collaborate to uncover viable answers, closely collaborating with the nonprofit and corporate sectors in areas like policy implementation. The public sector may discover a growing role as a convener and facilitator in this new system. Policy practitioners should learn to recognize who they need to bring to the table, how to foster cooperation, and how to mediate workable outcomes rather than imposing policy solutions, while that role will remain relevant in some situations.

3. A Centralized Information Database for Increased Access:

Politics and policy at the national, state, and local levels have changed and will continue to change as a result of increased information access. Practitioners of policy must be able to communicate information to people more swiftly and address their concerns. The centralization of information will allow for statistical profiling and data mining, which will improve the targeting of services and their delivery for both the public and government agencies.

4. An Established Structural Framework:

The policy sciences advise using "conceptual frameworks" as intellectual tools to narrow the scope of investigation. These frameworks help to combine disparate pieces of information about the issue into a thorough framework. In this approach, various theories and pieces of information can be merged into a thorough picture of the issue, and alternative solutions can be considered.

5. Relevant Competencies:

A set of more practical, frequently more "human" skills are referred to as competencies. Evidence from the study revealed the importance of the need for soft skills for the success of this program. Hence, to ensure that policy practitioners' talents are relevant for the 21st century, the researcher proposes that such programs like STEP undergo regular reappraisals to ascertain whether the human skills being taught are in line with the demands of society. Competencies in the areas of communication (Meltsner, 1980), information management, conflict resolution, mediation and facilitation (Fischer, 1998; Schon and Rein, 1994; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987), and ethics and values (Tang, 1986); along with other soft skills, are particularly important for today's practitioners, though this list is not exhaustive.

6. Strengthening of the Labor Market and Social Insurance programs:

With Barbados and the Bahamas as the exceptions, the bulk of Caribbean nations' social protection systems do not provide coverage for some risks, such as the chance of losing one's work. Severance payments, one of the measures now in place to preserve labor income, are inadequate at protecting income in the event of job loss, particularly during a crisis. One way to improve employees' shock protection mechanisms and make it easier to find work again is to increase the coverage of current mechanisms through formal employment. On the other hand, new social insurance programs like (Un)Employment Insurance must be created. Evidence from the study supports this recommendation.

5.6 Recommendations for future researchers

This study focused on the small twin-island Federation of St Kitts and Nevis, using a small sample size of the population to determine the impact of a single government-initiated safety net program implemented to address the issue of youth unemployment. Due to the limitations encountered for this study (with regards to sample size and time), the researcher recommends that future studies on this subject of the impact of social safety net programs on youth unemployment should consider utilizing comparable data with a comparative angle to enrich the understanding of outcomes among similar small island developing states.

Future studies could expand on youth unemployment and social safety nets to involve a comparison of multiple programs of this nature across more countries over longer periods. This would help to inform greater discussions on strategies to improve public policy systems to support the poor and unemployed. Such research can also provide valuable directions for policy reforms within the region. Steps should therefore be taken by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and other similar governments within the sub-region to work together to establish the necessary systems for such initiatives.

According to a press release of April 2018 published by the World Bank, social safety net programs are making a substantial impact in the global fight against poverty. However, despite the increased adoption of safety net programs by countries in recent years, there is a lack of research on the impact of such programs on youth unemployment within small developing economies. Despite progress, much more needs to be done regarding social safety nets programs for the poor and vulnerable within the Caribbean region. Significant gaps in coverage and benefit levels remain, and the international, regional and national development community needs to continue working with such countries to address these disparities. From the findings of this study, and the recommendations put forth, future researchers can build on this to create a model for small island developing governments to effectively address the issue of youth unemployment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Statistics																			
		1. Are you an intern for the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP)?	2. What gender do you identify as?	3. What is your exact age in years?	4. What is the highest level of education you have attained?	5. Were you unemployed before you were enrolled in STEP?	6. Was STEP your first means of earning an income?	7. How were you selected for the STEP program?	8. How long have you been a participant in the STEP program?	9. What is your understanding of the purpose of STEP?	10. What benefits have you gained from being a part of this program? Tick all that apply	11. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, what kind of financial impact has STEP made on your life? Select only one.	12. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how would you rate this program in terms of importance for the economy of Sri Lanka and Nepal? Select only one.	13. What factors do you think contribute to the success of the STEP program? Tick all that may apply	14. What can you identify as hindrances to the STEP program? Tick all that may apply	15. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, to what extent has the SLICR helped to increase your income? Select only one.	16. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how satisfied are you with your overall experience of STEP?	17. Would you recommend this skills and training program to someone who has not experienced it?	18. If you were given the position to direct or manage this program what would you do differently to the current operation?
N	Valid	44	44	43	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
	Missing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean				27.77								3.57	4.34				3.43	3.59	
Median				27.00								3.50	4.50				3.00	4.00	
Mode				22								3	5				3	4	
Std. Deviation				6.546								1.043	.776				1.189	.948	
Variance				42.849								1.088	.602				1.414	.899	
Skewness				.736								-.190	-1.002				-.309	-.445	
Std. Error of Skewness				.361								.357	.357				.357	.357	
Range				25								4	3				4	4	
Minimum				20								1	2				1	1	
Maximum				45								5	5				5	5	
Sum				1194								157	191				151	158	
Percentiles																			
	25			22.00								3.00	4.00				3.00	3.00	
	50			27.00								3.50	4.50				3.00	4.00	
	75			33.00								4.00	5.00				4.00	4.00	

Frequency Table for STEP Interns

Appendix 2

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	40	1	2	1.70	.464
Age	40	17	29	19.75	3.256
Are you employed	40	1	2	1.93	.267
Employee Status	4	2	2	2.00	.000
Reason for current employment status	40	1	4	2.15	.736
Reason for current employment status second choice	8	2	3	2.62	.518
Knowledge of STEP	40	1	2	1.25	.439
Participation in STEP	40	1	2	1.75	.439
Reason for non participation	40	1	6	4.15	1.762
Description of STEP program	39	1	7	2.97	2.032
Rate of STEP success	40	2	5	3.48	.933
Reason for success	40	1	10	6.65	3.207
Rate of financial improvement of persons as a result of STEP	40	1	5	3.38	1.005
Rate of Reduction of unemployment	40	1	5	3.38	.807
Level of importance of STEP on the economy	40	2	5	4.18	.958
Reason for rating Importance of STEP	40	1	7	4.15	1.791
Valid N (listwise)	0				

Frequency Table for Unemployed/ Non-STEP interns

Appendix 3

2017

BUSINESS SECTOR	Under 20		20-29		30-44		45-54		55-62		Over 62	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Business Services	7	38	11	79	8	47	2	7	2	0	0	0
Domestic Services	0	8	2	27	2	18	0	17	2	13	0	1
Hotel/Restaurant	0	31	13	46	8	26	4	8	1	3	0	0
Wholesale/Retail	12	39	18	58	8	35	3	8	0	3	0	0
Security	1	1	7	3	4	0	7	0	1	1	0	0
Transportation	1	0	13	1	13	1	6	0	6	0	2	0
Construction	8	0	32	1	18	0	5	0	6	0	1	0
Manufacturing	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Agriculture	1	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Services	13	6	37	15	20	11	6	9	2	1	0	1
TOTAL	43	133	139	230	84	138	33	50	20	21	3	2

Table showing category of employed persons according to age, gender and sector

Source: Department of Labor St Kitts-Nevis

Appendix 4

Total Number of Employed Youth 18-35 by Industry Prior to 2015							
Age	18		35		Total		
Sex	F	M	F	M	Total		
Industry							
AGRICULTURE, HUNTING AND FORESTRY	9	75	64	232	296		3,739
CONSTRUCTION	74	811	294	3,289	3,583		46,257
EDUCATION	42	32	312	198	510		5,503
ELECTRICITY, GAS AND WATER SUPPLY	17	43	32	81	113		2,278
EXTRA-TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BODIES	0	0	7	4	11		89
FINANCIAL INTERMEDIATION	119	73	400	145	545		8,703
FISHING	0	0	0	0	0		10
HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK	35	6	112	40	152		2,433
HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS	671	448	1,947	1,092	3,039		52,570
MANUFACTURING	189	255	1,378	924	2,302		32,129
MINING AND QUARRYING	0	7	3	4	7		177
OTHER COMMUNITY, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES	129	204	690	579	1,269		19,258
PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS WITH EMPLOYED PERSONS	13	22	147	108	255		3,054
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE; COMPULSORY SOCIAL SECURITY	753	865	2,232	1,709	3,941		62,918
REAL ESTATE, RENTING AND BUSINESS ACTIVITIES	182	189	747	614	1,361		21,656
TRANSPORT, STORAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS	186	172	489	524	1,013		17,141
Undefined	0	0	3	8	11		39
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES, MOTORCYCLES AND PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS	674	639	1,452	1,059	2,511		47,086
Total	3,093	3,841	10,309	10,610	20,919		325,040

Source: Social Security – St Kitts – Nevis

Appendix 5

Total Number of Employed Youth Aged 18-35 by Industry from 2015 to 2020							
Age	18		35				Grand Total
Sex	F	M	F	M	Total		
Industry							
AGRICULTURE, HUNTING AND FORESTRY	6	50	48	245	293		3,745
CONSTRUCTION	38	458	346	3,318	3,664		40,848
EDUCATION	18	14	330	172	502		4,724
ELECTRICITY, GAS AND WATER SUPPLY	22	60	62	96	158		2,791
EXTRA-TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BODIES	0	0	5	2	7		36
FINANCIAL INTERMEDIATION	128	53	488	174	662		9,985
FISHING	0	0	1	0	1		17
HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK	28	19	138	73	211		2,612
HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS	354	213	2,686	1,627	4,313		54,021
MANUFACTURING	168	183	1,797	991	2,788		27,730
MINING AND QUARRYING	0	4	2	9	11		232
OTHER COMMUNITY, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES	124	189	758	748	1,506		18,498
PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS WITH EMPLOYED PERSONS	8	14	182	115	297		2,565
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE; COMPULSORY SOCIAL SECURITY	399	473	2,683	1,929	4,612		65,854
REAL ESTATE, RENTING AND BUSINESS ACTIVITIES	90	125	909	818	1,727		21,157
TRANSPORT, STORAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS	109	146	625	589	1,214		17,857
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES, MOTORCYCLES AND PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS	639	703	1,925	1,542	3,467		55,191
Total	2,131	2,704	12,985	12,448	25,433		327,863

Source: Social Security – St Kitts – Nevis

Appendix 6

Summary Table 2: SKN Labor Market Summary Indicators by Sex - 2013			
	Male	Female	Total
Working-age population ('000s)	16	18	33.7
Labor force ('000s)	12	13	25.6
Labor force participation rate (%)	77.5	74.7	76.0
Employment ('000s)	12	13	24.6
Employment-to-population ratio (%)	75.1	71.2	73.1
Unemployment ('000s)	0.4	0.6	1.0
Unemployment rate (%)	3.1	4.6	3.9
Time-related underemployed ('000s)	2.6	2.3	4.9
Time-related underemployment as a share of labor force (%)	21.1	17.0	19.0
Youth unemployment ('000s)	0.1	0.3	0.4
Youth unemployment rate (%)	4.3	11.7	8.1
Youth NEET share of youth population (%)	4.0	11.2	7.7
Share of vulnerable employment in total employment (%)	10.8	6.5	8.6
Earnings (local currency units)	2,641.7	2,296.4	2,465.2

Source: Statistical Department – Govt St Kitts and Nevis

Appendix 7

Summary table 2: SKN Labor market summary table, by sex - 2016			
	Male	Female	
Working-age population ('000s)	14	15	29.6
Labor force ('000s)	11	11	22.1
Labor force participation rate (%)	76.0	74.0	74.9
Employment ('000s)	11	11	21.7
Employment-to-population ratio (%)	74.4	72.6	73.4
Unemployment ('000s)	0.2	0.2	0.4
Unemployment rate (%)	2.1	1.9	2.0
Time-related underemployed ('000s)	0.1	0.1	0.3
Time-related underemployment as a share of labor force (%)	1.2	1.3	1.2
Youth unemployment ('000s)	0.1	0.1	0.2
Youth unemployment rate (%)	4.2	4.5	4.5
Earnings (local currency units)	5.3	4.9	5.1

Source: Statistical Department – Govt St Kitts and Nevis

Appendix 8

Table 17: SKN Employment by Sector and Sex- 2013			
	Male	Female	Both sexes
Employment by sector ('000s)			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0.6	0.2	0.8
Mining and quarrying	0.0		0.0
Manufacturing	0.8	1.1	2.0
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	0.2	0.1	0.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0.1	0.1	0.1
Construction	1.9	0.1	2.0
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1.1	1.4	2.4
Transportation and storage	0.7	0.3	1.0
Accommodation and food service activities	1.2	1.9	3.1
Information and communication	0.2	0.2	0.3
Financial and insurance activities	0.3	0.7	1.0
Real estate activities	0.2	0.1	0.3
Professional, scientific and technical activities	0.3	0.4	0.7
Administrative and support service activities	0.8	0.5	1.3
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	2.2	2.0	4.2
Education	0.6	1.7	2.3
Human health and social work activities	0.2	1.1	1.3
Arts, entertainment and recreation	0.2	0.1	0.3
Other service activities	0.2	0.2	0.4
Activities of households as employers	0.1	0.3	0.3
Not stated	0.2	0.3	0.5
Total	11.9	12.7	24.6
Sector employment shares (%)			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	5.3	1.6	3.4
Mining and quarrying	0.2	0.0	0.1
Manufacturing	7.0	8.9	8.0
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1.9	0.8	1.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0.8	0.4	0.6
Construction	15.5	0.8	8.0
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	8.7	11.1	9.9
Transportation and storage	6.0	2.3	4.1
Accommodation and food service activities	9.9	14.9	12.5
Information and communication	1.3	1.5	1.4
Financial and insurance activities	2.2	5.6	3.9
Real estate activities	1.6	1.1	1.3
Professional, scientific and technical activities	2.5	3.1	2.8
Administrative and support service activities	6.9	4.1	5.5
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	18.4	15.2	16.7
Education	4.9	13.0	9.0
Human health and social work activities	1.5	8.9	5.2
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1.5	0.7	1.1
Other service activities	1.9	1.6	1.7
Activities of households as employers	0.5	2.4	1.5
Not stated	1.6	2.1	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Department of Statistics, Govt St Kitts - Nevis

Appendix 9

Table 38: Unemployed and unemployment rate by educational attainment, sex and age group - 2013									
	Male			Female			Both sexes		
	15-25	26-65	15-65	15-25	26-65	15-65	15-25	26-65	15-65
Unemployment ('000s)									
Never attended	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Incomplete Primary Education	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Complete Primary Education	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Incomplete Secondary Education	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3
Complete Secondary Education	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.4
Incomplete Tertiary Education	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Complete Tertiary Education	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Total	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.6	1.0
Unemployment rate (%)									
Never attended	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Incomplete Primary Education	0.0	4.9	4.7		0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	2.7
Complete Primary Education	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Incomplete Secondary Education	4.2	2.5	2.9	16.4	2.6	3.9	7.6	2.6	3.4
Complete Secondary Education	1.4	3.9	3.3	12.7	5.1	6.8	7.6	4.5	5.2
Incomplete Tertiary Education	67.7	5.5	13.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.6	2.4	6.0
Complete Tertiary Education	7.3	1.0	2.0	8.7	2.7	4.2	8.3	2.0	3.3
Total	4.3	2.8	3.1	11.7	3.1	4.6	8.1	2.9	3.9

Source: Department of Statistics, Govt St Kitts – Nevis

Appendix 10



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
SAINT CHRISTOPHER AND NEVIS

25th October, 2021

Dr Cristina Isabel Ibarra Armenta
Doctoral Supervisor
UNICAF University
Unit 1 Shoppers Mall
Area 4, Plot 67
MALAWI

Dear Dr. Armenta

We hereby advise that permission has been granted, during the period November 2021 to March 2022, for Mr Nigel Browne to engage with official and interns of the Skills Training and Empowerment Program (STEP) implemented by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis as participants in his research project for the completion of his doctoral studies.

As a citizen of the Federation of St Kitts and Nevis, we extend best wishes and every success to Mr Browne in acquiring his Doctorate in Business Administration.

Sincerely,

Osbert DeSuza
Permanent Secretary
Office of the Prime Minister

Appendix 11



UREC Decision, Version 2.0

**Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee
Decision****Student's Name:** Nigel Alexander Browne**Student's ID #:** R1710D3686620**Supervisor's Name:** Dr Cristina Isabel Ibarra Armenta**Program of Study:** UU-DBA-900-3-29353**Offer ID /Group ID:** O29353G30821**Dissertation Stage:** DS 3**Research Project Title:** An Investigation into the STEP (Skills Training Empowerment Program) to determine its impact on the Reduction of Youth Unemployment in St. Kitts and Nevis**Comments:** No comments**Decision*:** A. Approved without revision or comments**Date:** 25-Nov-2021

*Provisional approval provided at the Dissertation Stage 1, whereas the final approval is provided at the Dissertation stage 3. The student is allowed to proceed to data collection following the final approval.

Appendix 12



SDS Decision, Version 1.0



School of Doctoral Studies
Pre-Viva Voce Examination Evaluation Decision

Student's Name: Nigel Alexander Browne

Student's ID #: R1710D3686620

Supervisor's Name: Dr Cristina Isabel Ibarra Armenta

Program of Study: Choose from the list

Offer ID /Group ID: O54860G56273

Module: Dissertation Examination Stage

Thesis Title:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SKILLS TRAINING EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (STEP)
 TO DETERMINE ITS IMPACT ON THE REDUCTION OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN
 ST.KITTS AND NEVIS

Comments:

- Very Good and Interesting Topic
- However, you are required to make sure that your statement of the problem brings out what is on the ground and it should be able to talk to the research topic
- You mentioned the significance of the study but you need to clearly state who are the beneficiaries and how they will benefit from the study.
- The innovation part of your study should be clearly stated so that the contribution of the study is easily noticed
- You need to easily answer the question "What is the most important contribution your study can make to your profession or society?"
- Make sure your Objectives are SMART
- The sampling technique for the quantitative part of the research should be justified by a proper calculation using statistical formalis. While that for the qualitative part of the research should be justified by the concept of saturation. This is when, through the course of interviewing (or observation), you notice the same themes coming out, repeatedly. As you interview more and more participants, you stop finding new themes, ideas, opinions, or patterns then you have reached saturation.
- The questionnaire should be pretested before using it for the actual study. This is very important as it helps to determine if respondents understand the questions as well as if they can perform the tasks or have the information that questions require. Pre-tests also provide the most direct evidence for the validity of the questionnaire data for most items.
- Proper inferential statistics should be used to back the decision of whether or not the null hypothesis associated with the alternative hypothesis should be rejected or confirmed.
- The themes from the qualitative part of the research should also be presented.
- The implications of your study is not clearly stated. It is important to clearly state the implications as Research implications suggest how the findings may be important for policy, practice, theory, and subsequent research.
- The Analysis section of the thesis is poorly done and it needs to be improved.

Decision*: B. Proceed with Minor Corrections - Extension

Date: 06-Sep-2023

Appendix 13



UU_GL - Version 2.0

Gatekeeper letter

Address: Eastern Caribbean Central Bank

Date: 20-Oct-2021

Subject: Doctoral Research - Nigel A Browne

Dear Governor,

I am a **doctoral** student at Unicaf University **Malawi**.

As part of my degree I am carrying out a study on the socio-economic impact of social safety net programs and their impact in relation to youth unemployment.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to **grant permission for me to engage economists from the Research Department at the ECCB as participants** in this research.

Subject to approval by Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) this study will be using a series of **interviews, focus groups and questionnaires**.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent of the impact on the reduction of youth unemployment in the economy of St. Kitts and Nevis, as a direct result of the **implementation of the Skills Training Empowerment Program (STEP) by the Federal Government**. Hence, the project is entitled: **An Investigation into the Implementation of STEP to determine its impact on the Reduction of Youth Unemployment in St. Kitts-Nevis**. The name of my research supervisor is **Dr Cristina Isabel Ibarra Armenta**.

Toward this end, I kindly request an official correspondence addressed to UREC (Unicaf Research Ethics Committee) on my behalf, allowing me to recruit participants on your premises and granting access to personal data after participants have consented. The estimated time of engagement of these persons will be over a period of **four weeks during November 2021**.

Thank you in advance for your time and for your consideration of this project. Kindly please let me know if you require any further information or need any further clarifications.

Yours Sincerely,

Nigel A Browne

Student's Name: Nigel A. Browne

Student's E-mail: nabanumber1@gmail.com

Student's Address and Telephone: #199 Clico Housing Dev, Saint Peters, St. Kitts

Supervisor's Title and Name: Dr Cristina Isabel Ibarra Armenta

Supervisor's Position: Doctoral Supervisor

Supervisor's E-mail: c.armenta@unicaf.org

Appendix 14

**Eastern Caribbean Central Bank**

P O BOX 89, BASSETERRE, ST KITTS, WEST INDIES

20 October 2021

Dr. Cristina Isabel Ibarra Armenta
Doctoral Supervisor
UNICAF University
Unit 1 Shoppers Mall
Area 4, Plot 67
MALAWI

Dear Dr. Armenta

We are pleased to inform that approval has been granted for **Mr Nigel Browne** to engage economists from the Research Department of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank as part of his research project for the completion of his Doctorate in Business Administration over the period 01 – 30 November, 2021.

We are grateful for the opportunity to assist Mr Browne in his studies to acquire his Doctorate in Business Administration at the UNICAF University and wish him all the best with the project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jolene Newton'.

Jolene Newton (Mrs)
Director
Human Resource Department

tj

cc Nigel Browne

Appendix 15

Mixed study: Qualitative & Quantitative

Table 1: Variables, Constructs, Indicators and Operational definitions

Qualitative Study - (interviews)					
Variables	Type	Conceptual Definition	Measurement Indicator(s)	Operational definition	IQ/Source/Reference
1. STEP program	Independent; predictor	Perspective – views held by stakeholders	1. <i>Behavior</i> of interns 2. <i>Attitude</i> of employer agents 3. <i>Attitude</i> of Government officials 4. <i>Type/quality of management structure</i>	The perspective of the stakeholders should be a positive one towards the success of the program where stakeholders fulfil their obligation	IQ7: What issues/hindrances prevent greater success of STEP? IQ8: What are the recommended measures for improvement?
		Skills – <i>unskilled</i> <i>semi-skilled</i> <i>skilled</i> <i>professional</i>	1. <i>Type</i> 2. <i>Level</i> 3. <i>Relevance</i>	The type and level of skills taught/acquired by interns would determine success of the program	IQ3: To what extent are the objectives of STEP met?

		– how relevant to current jobs		The relevance of skills to current available jobs in the market	
		Training – provided for interns	1. <i>Frequency</i> 2. <i>Quality</i>	The regularity and type of training resulting in CVQ qualification determine success	IQ3: To what extent are the objectives of STEP met?
		Empowerment – attributed to interns	1. <i>Permanent employment</i> 2. <i>Established businesses</i>	The number of permanent jobs created along with established entrepreneurs will determine success of program	IQ6: How much is youth unemployment reduced as a result of STEP? IQ9: How sustainable is the program in its current form?
2. Youth unemployment	Dependent; criterion	Impact – attributed to the level of effect on youth unemployment as a result of the STEP program	1. <i>Trainees</i> 2. <i>Jobs</i>	The number of trainees who successfully graduate from the program; The number of persons	IQ6: How much is youth unemployment reduced as a result of STEP?

				employed by STEP; The number of permanent jobs – these will determine the extent of the impact	
Quantitative Study - (questionnaires)					
Variables	Type	Conceptual Definition	Measurement Indicator(s)	Operational definition	Q/Source/Reference
1. STEP program	independent	Impact – on the labor market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Labor market conditions</i> <i>Number of jobs</i> 	The improvement of the labor market prior to and during STEP defined by number of jobs	Q4: How important is STEP for the economy?
		Impact – on economy (small private businesses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Government assistance to private sector</i> 	The number of private businesses assisted with paid wage labor	Q5: What level of contribution has STEP made to the economy?

		Impact – on wage conditions	• <i>Wage payment</i>	The comparison of wages paid in the program to market wages	Q5: What level of contribution has STEP made to the economy?
		Impact – on job provision	<i>Employment/income opportunity</i>	The number of persons who are employed by the program	
2. Youth unemployment	dependent	Impact – level of effect on economy (contribution to GDP)	<i>Youth unemployment rate for age group 18 - 35</i>	For given age group, this represents the number of people unemployed divided by the total number of people in the labor force (emp + unemp)	
		Impact – level of effect on economy	<i>Youth employment rate/percentage</i>	The percentage of interns integrated into the labor force as a result of STEP	