The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Faculty of Humanities and Education
Caribbean Studies Project
HUMN 3099

COVER PAGE
Student name:  ___KAMILAH WILLIAMS_______________
Student ID no.:  ___814000319_____________________
Degree Program: _BA- MAJOR IN FRENCH, MINOR IN LINGUISTICS
Supervisor:  __________M. DALLIER___________________

Title of Thesis: ACADEMIC LABELING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TRINIDAD______________

---

**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.

I authorise The University of the West Indies to make a physical or digital copy of my thesis/research paper/project report for its preservation, for public reference, and for the purpose of inter-library loan.

I consent to have my attached thesis used in any publication comprising Caribbean Studies Projects by The University of the West Indies. I understand that I will receive no compensation. I hereby assign publishing rights for the contribution to The University of the West Indies, including all copyrights.

Signature of Student: ___________________________ Date: ____________________
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Undergraduate Coursework Accountability Statement (To be completed by student)

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-2017   SEMESTER: II
COURSE CODE: HUMN 3099   TITLE: Caribbean Studies Project
NAME: __KAMILAH WILLIAMS_____________   ID: _814000319_____________________________

1. I hereby certify that I am the author of the attached item of coursework and that all materials from reference sources have been properly acknowledged.

2. I understand what plagiarism is and what penalties may be imposed on students found guilty of plagiarism.

3. I certify that this paper contains no plagiarised material.

4. I certify that this is my own work and that I did not receive any unfair assistance from others (including unauthorized collaboration) in its preparation.

5. I certify that this paper has not previously been submitted either in its entirety or in part within the UWI system or to any other educational institution.

6. In the case of group work:
   a. I certify that the individual work of each member of the group has been clearly indicated;
   b. that where no such indication has been given, I take the responsibility for the work as if it were the section of the paper for which I am solely responsible; and
   c. that I have not collaborated with any members of the group to breach the University’s regulations.

Signature: .................................................................

Date: .................................................................
Table of Contents

❖ Abstract 1-2
❖ Introduction 2
   ➢ Methodology 3-4
❖ Literature Review
   ➢ The labeling theory 5-6
   ➢ The effects of labeling in the education system
      ■ Self-fulfilling prophesies 6-7
      ■ Pygmalion effect 7-8
   ➢ Positive aspect of labeling 8-9
   ➢ Negative aspect of labeling 9-10
   ➢ Factors which influence labels in the education system 10-12
   ➢ Gaps 12
❖ Findings 13-23
❖ Discussion 24-28
❖ Conclusion 29
❖ Works Cited 30-31
❖ Appendix 32-34
# Table of figures

- Figure 1: 13
- Figure 2: 15
- Figure 3: 16
- Figure 4: 20
- Figure 5: 20
- Figure 6: 21
- Figure 7: 21
- Figure 8: 22
- Figure 9: 23
Abstract

This research paper focuses on secondary schools in Trinidad, as a means of understanding and highlighting the labels or classifications that are generally constructed. As a foreign student having spent two years observing the many different secondary schools which exist in Trinidad and the attitudes and comments directed at specific schools, it was imperative to conduct this research to obtain a clearer understanding of the labels assigned to these institutions. In addition, acknowledging that students who attended certain secondary schools exhibited differing characteristics to others, it was of profound interest to scrutinize these schools so as to identify possible future implications of attending a specific secondary school. As a result, to assess the notion of academic labeling in secondary schools in Trinidad, this research will attempt to address three key questions. They include the major labels that are attached to some secondary schools, the effects and ramifications of such labels on the students who attend these secondary schools, and whether or not these labels affect the future of students positively or negatively. Two questionnaires were diffused to participants who comprised students of varying secondary schools in Trinidad as well as Trinidadians from diverse communities. Each question was analyzed and the findings were generally linked to the three main research questions and the literature review. Acknowledging that labeling in its general sense is an inevitable component of human life, it is without a doubt that the labels applied to secondary schools in Trinidad may not be relinquished even if attempts are made to nullify labels. Moreover, education should focus on fostering and developing minds and young people for the benefit of the nation. Therefore, the onus is on the government and the citizens of Trinidad to foster safe and effective environments of learning in every academic institution across the nation. Providing that examinations are
integral in the labeling process, further research should be considered in finding alternative methods for assessing student’s abilities.

**Academic labeling in Secondary Schools in Trinidad.**

**Introduction**

The education system is of great importance. Consequently, attending school is regarded as an integral part of social mobility. Primary level students are required to complete test-based assessments in order to obtain access to a secondary school in Trinidad. This type of entrance exam enables the Ministry of Education to place students in secondary schools based on their academic performance in the examination. The process of secondary school entrance is not however, limited to the entrance examinations, but also requires school selection from students. The Republican Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, as stated in a study by De Lisle, Keller, Jules, and Smith (2009), permits parents/guardians to choose the choices of secondary schools for their child/ward. Selection of a secondary school is based upon a number of factors. Religion, location, academic performance, and extra-curricular activities are some of the factors that parents and their children may consider when deciding upon a secondary school for their child. Despite these factors, the “first choice” is usually one which has high academic overall performance. This is so, because parents attempt to ensure that their child acquires the best educational experience. Consequently, many other secondary institutions are perceived negatively by the general public, which results in parents refusing to send their children to such institutions. However, only a few out of the entire student population can be guaranteed a spot in
their “first choice” school. The others are placed in other schools based on their scores. This system of placement may or may not affect the child in the future.

While most studies focus on academic labeling in terms of learning disabilities or gender issues within the educational system, this study aims at focusing on secondary schools and their expectations. It therefore also seeks to respond to three pertinent questions, namely:

1. What are the major labels that are attached to Trinidadian secondary schools?
2. What are the effects and ramifications of such labels on the students who attend these secondary schools?
3. Do these labels affect the future of students positively or negatively?

**Methodology**

To obtain information to effectively respond to the above questions, a qualitative approach was considered and it was imperative to attain the views of the persons affected or who contribute to this phenomenon. Thus two online questionnaires were diffused. The first was directed towards the general public and the second at secondary school students. Several interviews were also conducted as a means of obtaining additional support information.

Acquiring information about secondary schools in Trinidad will facilitate a greater understanding about the labels that Trinidadians attach to these institutions. Respondents were made aware of the nature of the questionnaire and were encouraged to participate. The anonymity and confidentiality of those involved were ensured, as they were not permitted to state their names or any other information which they felt would infringe on their private lives. Furthermore, as it concerns the students, relevant permission was sought from their parents/
guardians. The total number of student participants were 15, ranging from the ages of 13 to 19, and comprising both males and females of twelve secondary schools. These students were selected to provide information based on their experiences at their current schools and to provide basic specific information on their journey from the primary level to the secondary level. Individuals, who would have completed secondary schooling, were also selected to provide data to support the three major research questions. Upon acquiring sufficient quantity responses, each question and response was critical assessed and utilized.

This information can also be applied as a means of sensitizing the general public about the effects and ramifications of labeling on students. It is important to establish that in an effort to eradicate illiteracy and to promote and encourage education despite varying learning abilities, education should not be a situation where students are classified, labeled or stratified. Since examinations play a huge role in the education system of Trinidad, attempts to find alternative methods of testing should be an addressed priority.

The first chapter of the research paper will focus on the literatures consulted, highlighting the problem, the various effects associated with the problem of academic labeling as well as information concerning academic labeling in Secondary Schools in Trinidad. The second portion will concentrate on the findings generated by questionnaires. This section attempts to provide proof as to how the labeling theory applies to secondary schools. The last chapter will focus on an in depth analysis of the findings in relation to the literature review.
Literature review

In an attempt to understand the notion of academic labeling and its implications on secondary schools in Trinidad, this chapter will give a brief overview of the labeling theory and its introduction into the education system. It will also address effects, positive and negative aspects as well as factors which lead to labeling, with specific reference to the education system of Trinidad.

The labeling theory

Originally associated with the field of sociology, the labeling theory has been applied in recent years to the education system as a determining factor of academic outcomes based on the labels attached to students. In sociology, the labeling theory is utilized to examine and study deviant behaviors as exemplified by Howard Becker in the 1950’s and 1960’s. According to Howard Becker, it is not imperative for an individual who is labeled deviant to remain in that state, however, once a label is attached, it becomes more likely that the individual will take deviant paths (Howard Becker, Ray C Rist). The labeling theory is therefore based on the notion that behaviors of deviance are not inherent to an act but rather to the tendency of a large scale or societal stigma which is perceived as contrary to societal norms. The theory also holds two types of deviance. The first, primary deviance is identified as the stage wherein an individual commits an initial criminal act, and is given the label based on the crime committed such as deviant or a criminal. However in this stage the person fails to view or consider him/herself as a criminal. Secondary deviance on the other hand, is perceived as the individual accepting that he or she is deviant according to the labels that society has fastened to him/her. It is therefore an act of
defense towards societal reaction to the initial criminal act.

Similarly, in the education system academic labeling is a prevalent issue. Labeling can result from a number of factors, which include but are not limited to, grades, race, ethnicity, gender, class and place of residency. Based on these factors, teachers may expect that the student performs at a certain level, and in extreme cases may label the student/students as unable to excel. The many literature consulted have indicated that in the classroom and on grade or form levels, students were separated according to their academic performances. Thus, resulting in labels such as “bright class/group” and “slow class/group”. All these examples are prevalent in secondary schools in Trinidad. However, this study not only recognizes the labels attached to students in the education system but also aims at identifying the labels that are also attached to secondary schools and the negative and positive impacts of attending any specific secondary school in Trinidad.

Effects of labeling in the education system

Self-fulfilling prophesies

According to an article which cites a description of the self-fulfilling prophecy by academic researcher Ray Rist, the self-fulfilling prophecy is “an expectation which defines a situation [that] comes to influence the actual behavior within the situation so as to produce what was initially assumed to be there” (qtd. In “Academic labeling and its effects”). This definition therefore states that whatever label or classification that is given to an individual, one of the psychological outcomes is that the individual begins to perceive himself/herself as such.
In a similar way, this phenomenon occurs in the education system. Students who are grouped according to their level of performance will learn to accept their labels and eventually emanate these qualities. For example, a student who is constantly told “you can do it” will begin to challenge himself/herself to achieve or succeed at the given task. In the same way, if a student is placed in an environment, class or group where their peers perform poorly in comparison to another class or group the student will begin to express feelings of self-doubt and this will deter him/her from trying to work harder.

Thus, this study will also examine whether or not students who are placed in a particular secondary school exhibit qualities of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Therefore, identifying if students who attend a “prestige secondary school” or a “government secondary school” in Trinidad are affected by the labels or classifications assigned to them by society.

**Pygmalion effect**

Unlike the self-fulfilling prophecy, the Pygmalion effect pushes the individual to achieve what he/she may have conceived as impossible. Developed by Rosenthal and Jacobsen, among others, the Pygmalion effect demonstrates that teacher expectations influence student performance. In so doing, it is believed that positive expectations influence positive performances and negative expectations will influence performances in a negative manner. The Duquense University article cites the statement of Rosenthal and Babad on this concept, stating “When we expect certain behaviors of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behavior more likely to occur” (qtd. In “The Pygmalion Effect”). As a result, in the classroom teachers tend to teach a lot more simple concepts, conduct more drills and give simple
assignments, if the students that they have in their care are unable to perform harder tasks or are not perceived to be very intelligent. This effect can also extend beyond one specific subject area, for example at the secondary level if teacher of subject A labels a particular student as incapable of passing, teacher of subject B and C may also perceive the same student as such without even assessing the learner’s competence in that specific subject area. This occurs when teachers meet in the staffroom and discuss student academic performances.

More positively, the Pygmalion effect can alter a student's perspective on his/her academic abilities. When students are faced with difficult assignments and receive encouraging words, despite their label (unintelligent/intelligent) they begin to work harder to complete the assignment, compared to a student who receives no encouragement and may or may not decide to complete the assignment. Moreover, students with positive influence may advance up the academic ladder, thus changing their status from “dunce” to “bright”.

Positive aspect of labeling

Labeling within the education system can be seen as an essential process, when the goal is to identify the learning needs and abilities of each student and to produce a learning environment which can assist in their academic growth. It is believed that within every classroom, there exists a hierarchy of learners, those at the top who are classified as “bright/smart”, those in-between, and those at the very bottom who are considered “slow/dunce”. Teachers and educators play an important role in the labeling process.

In the initial stage, a teacher can base his/her assumption on a student’s academic level based on previous grades, for example grades obtained from the primary level during the
transition to secondary education or on other information given to the teacher on the student’s academic or socioeconomic status. As a result, the teacher may decide to divide the students so that those who are stronger in a particular subject area are not slowed down by those who require more attention and explanation. Another approach may include adjusting the lesson plans to cater for the “slower” and “faster” students. Therefore, students will be given assignments, tasks and varying number of questions to tackle (on the same topic) based on their academic levels. With these approaches, the individuals who are at the bottom of the academic scale are given the relevant attention that they require to understand concepts within a subject, while those at the top will be pushed to excel further. This type of academic labeling also produces an environment that is conducive to all forms of learning abilities, and fosters growth not only in academia but growth in self-esteem of the “slower” learners.

**Negative aspect labeling**

Although some positive aspects emanate from the labeling process, it also produces a number of negative reactions, not only from teachers and the individuals being labeled but also the reactions of peers. Students are humans and are therefore aware of the divisions or classifications within a given classroom setting. Teachers may utilize mental labels; where they alone make the distinction between their learner’s abilities or explicit labels where the learners are made aware of their varying potentials. Negative labels impact mainly slower learners but may also include learners with attention disorders or those who are disruptive, or those of a lower socioeconomic standing. Many are of the opinion that attaching a label, be it good or bad, can have long term effects on the person labeled. As it relates to the teacher, assigning a label to
a student can foster feelings of hatred, frustration, or dislike towards some and favoritism towards others. These students do not only attain these labels at one level, however as they move upwards to other classes and new teachers, their new teachers would continue to label them; implicitly or explicitly as they were labeled previously. On the one hand, the students who are assigned the more positive labels tend to exert a feeling of superiority over their classmates and depending on the characteristics of that student; he/she may verbally express the distinctions between who is smart and who is slower. On the other hand, the student who receives a negative classification/label may either begin to accept themselves as such or attempt to change their labels. In the event of the latter, they may encounter many obstacles such as classmates who will continuously perceive them as who they were labeled to be initially or feelings of depression and alienation.

**Factors which influence labels in the education system**

As previously mentioned, academic labeling can be viewed both as a negative and a positive occurrence. However, it seems to carry a more negative connotation, as the word “label” in itself implies a form of classification, segregation and division.

In the education system, many factors may influence the labeling or classification of students. One prime example is external sources, also termed second hand information. This type of information is obtained through test results, previous report cards and other forms of student evaluations. The teacher, upon viewing these results makes a mental note of the type of student that he or she has, and may label the students accordingly “smart or slow”.

Another example is that of first-hand information, which is obtained from teacher-student
interaction. This form does not only include assessments but also physical appearance and social background. In many societies, teachers have the tendency to associate wealth with intelligence and poverty with the uneducated. Therefore, a child’s physical appearance and his or her social class may provoke the educator to gravitate towards that student, and to have a greater expectation of that student.

In relation to the situation in Trinidad, history and the institution’s academic performances over the years also have played a key role in influencing labels. Firstly, according to research conducted by Delisle et al., an important characteristic of educational development in Trinidad from the 1800’s has been the constant tension between the state and the church, and even amongst denominations. The church was a system to reinforce good morals and loyalty within society. Furthermore, the elite were mainly those who would frequent, for instance, the Roman Catholic schools, which in turn promoted a sense of prestige (Delisle et al). These historical attributes have transcended over the years. Secondly, secondary schools in Trinidad are labeled prestigious and non-prestigious schools, based on the overall pass rates obtained at the CSEC examinations. It is perceived that parents have the tendency to select schools based on the curriculum offered, but also based on whether or not a school continues to dominate academically. In addition, the ‘first choice school’ is also selected on the basis that the school has a history of continued high academic passes, accomplishments and performances. Moreover, after conducting research on the notion of prestige schools, Raymond S. Hackett believes that there is no significant difference between the personnel of a denominational school and government school. He further exemplifies that if this difference does exist, it can be linked to the culture of the institution, the support of parents and well-intentioned stakeholders, and the
increasing influence of lessons.

**Gaps**

According to the literatures consulted, academic labeling tends to focus on classification among classroom divisions and small group divisions. However, there exist limited to no literature that is specific to the Trinidad situation concerning academic labeling. This study will therefore focus on the possibility of academic labeling based on the choice of secondary school attended. In Trinidad there exists what is termed “prestigious schools” and “government schools or non-prestigious school”, this study will also attempt to analyze if the Pygmalion effect and self-fulfilling prophecies can also be applied to choice of secondary schools, and to also identify teacher expectations as well as societal expectations of these two types of secondary schools in Trinidad.

As identified in this chapter, the labeling theory is not limited to one field of study, but can also be applied to the education system. The following chapter will examine how the labeling process is depicted within the education system, precisely as it relates to the division made between prestigious and non-prestigious secondary schools.
Findings

In general, based on the two questionnaires diffused among the general public and a number of students of varying secondary schools, several themes were highlighted, namely, school status and curriculum. The findings will concentrate on the questions posed in both questionnaires in order to respond to the three main research questions.

*Question 1 & 2 Was this school your first choice? 2. Why did you (choose to) attend this school?*

Preceding these two questions, the students were required to indicate the school that they currently attend. The subsequent questions and their corresponding results thus indicated that some factors would have impacted their decisions, namely academic and nonacademic.

Academics:

46.7% of respondents claimed that the secondary school which they are currently attending was indeed their “first choice”, as opposed to 53.3% who stated the contrary.

**TITLE: FIGURE 1 SHOWING GENERIC RESULTS OF QUESTIONS 1. Was this school your first choice?**
Therefore, this highlights the role that the placement system plays within the educational system in Trinidad. In that, upon completion of SEA students who did not obtain a certain grade level that will permit them to attend their ‘first choice school’ are allocated a spot in other schools by the relevant ministerial corps. The results show that for the majority of the schools indicated as first choice, positive features were attributed to them, such as overall academic performance (as in performance among secondary schools in CSEC examination within Trinidad and the region) as well as aspects depicting that of an interesting curriculum.

Furthermore, in the instances of first choice criteria, the majority of the schools were associated with the idea of being a “top school” or one of the “best schools” in Trinidad. To further exemplify the notion of “top school”/”best school”, respondents related such terms to the institution(s) on the condition that it/they was/were associated with an education system which focuses (though not entirely) on academia and quantity as well as quality pass rates at the class level and at the CSEC examinations.

Nonacademic reasons:

It is quite evident from the results that in cases where the secondary school attended were not a first choice; respondents gave reasons which were not entirely linked with academics but rather family history or location. “Close to home”, “some of my family members attended it”. “I got placed” etc. Compared to the findings on general public opinions, which will be discussed later on in this chapter, it appears that these factors are secondary to the views of a secondary school which is more academically skewed. Priority is placed primarily on good educational systems before location or the presence or lack thereof of a family member’s attendance.
Question 3. Was your choice of secondary school influenced by anyone? Please state relation (eg. Mother, friends, primary school teacher)

26.7% of students indicated that no individual in particular influenced their decisions, however this can be argued by the fact that other factors may have played an integral role in their choices, such as, the academic standing of the school, or an exhibition of independence on the part of the student. On the other hand, 83.3% of the students stated that their choice of secondary school was influenced by relatives as well as educators and peers. More precisely, 46.8% of the influence came from the father or the mother, 20.1% by a teacher; of which more than half were that of a primary school teacher, and the remaining 6.7% by friends.

TITLE: FIGURE 2 SHOWING GENERIC RESULTS FOR QUESTION 3 Was your choice of secondary school influenced by anyone?

Question 4 and 5. If you had a choice to attend any of the schools listed below which would you choose? Why did you select the secondary school above and not the others?

Students were given five options; Any of the Convents, Bishop’s Anstey High School
East & Trinity College East, Queen’s Royal College, St. James Government Secondary and Tranquility Government Secondary, of which they had to make a choice by selecting one of the schools which they would prefer to attend, provided that these five options were the only ones available. In addition students were asked not to select their current school if it was one of the options. 60% of the students selected Bishop’s Anstey High School East & Trinity College East, 26.7% selected Queen’s Royal College, and 13.3% selected Any of the Convents, whereas St. James Government Secondary and Tranquility Government Secondary were not selected.

**TITLE: FIGURE 3 SHOWING GENERIC RESULT FOR QUESTION 4.**

If you had a choice to attend any of the schools listed below which would you choose?

To obtain a better understanding of the reasons behind each student’s selection, research question number 5, *Why did you select the secondary school above and not the others?* was posed. The latter two options were not selected because of the label of “government school”. Based on interviews conducted among Trinidadians, it is believed that any secondary school
which carries such a label is perceived as “non-prestigious”, although this theory may also include other schools which do not carry this label. They also constitute schools which lack organisation, whose students and staff do not fully adhere to the rules, and which have poor academic performance. Therefore, these two choices were not chosen by the students. On the other hand, students chose the remaining three options mainly because of academics. The convents were labeled as schools which possess “good education systems” and “high pass rates”. Queen’s Royal College, was attributed qualitative adjectives such as “good and best” and was selected because it is “one of the top school’s in the country” as was highlighted by one of the respondents. The Bishop's Anstey & Trinity college east option was the most popular choice among the students, in that it appears to be the most well rounded school. Some respondents made comparisons with their current school and the chosen option, indicating that it offers a wider range of curricular activities as well as has and maintains a better reputation. Most responses highlighted the good reputation of the school and also incite the idea that anything contrary to this good reputation would result in a school that is “…ghetto”. “…they have a higher reputation than the others”, “…more teachers attending to school than the others”, “It has better learning facilities and more conduct”, “…positive remarks is made about it also the different curricular activities that the school provides”

**Question 6 What are the benefits of attending your secondary school?**

The general aim of this question was to identify the worth of the secondary school that the students attended as well as highlight attitudes towards the institutions by the same students who attend these secondary institutions. Every secondary school carries some level of benefit to
its students; however it is acknowledged that once comparisons are established between one institution and another, the level of benefit and worth either decreases or increases. The majority of responses indicated that students could identify positive aspects of their schools, such as subjects which are geared towards their differing learning abilities as stated by one of the students of North Gate College. “Benefits of attending my school, the different subject areas that my school offers where some schools don’t, such as technical Drawing and wood works.” In addition, students also highlighted the extracurricular and sporting activities which their schools possess and their achievements. The student of Tunapuna Secondary School stated “Well we have a lot of hockey players and I play hockey so we mostly come out victorious in tournaments”. Despite the attempts of students to highlight the various positive aspects of the secondary school that they attend, one student of ASJA, failed to identify the benefits, stating “nothing lol”. Based on a general overview of all of his responses, He could not state any benefit of this institution due to the fact that it was not his first choice of secondary school. He also stated that he did not wish to attend this school but was rather placed based on his performance at the SEA.

Parents play a major role at that stage of their child’s life as it relates to the choice of secondary school. Some students are not mature enough to make such decisions which may or may not impact their adolescent or adult life. Therefore, it is the prerogative of the parent or the teacher to direct the path of primary school students and the choice of secondary school that they should attend. It is also recognized that sending a child to a prestigious school, is the dream of most parents, for these institutions symbolize an improved or better education which in turn represents a secured future for their children/ students. As a result it was necessary to obtain
views of the general public concerning secondary schools.

*Question 1 & 2. Does the choice of secondary school that one attends define one’s academic performance? Should the choice of secondary school that one attends define one’s academic performance?*

Although all respondents stated no to the second question, responses varied concerning the first. 42.9% of responses indicated that the choice of secondary school that one attends does not define one’s academic performance. This results from a number of factors. Firstly, some students experience anxiety when faced with examinations and in most instances they fail to perform to the best of their abilities, and consequently they find themselves in a secondary school which may not be perceived as a “prestige school”. Secondly, once the resources and faculties are present in any given school, student’s performances should not be deterred. It is however, the ability, and willingness of the student which should determine their academic performance rather than the school.

On the other hand, 57.1% of responses indicated uncertainty as it relates to whether or not the secondary school attended defines one’s academic performance. This is due to the fact that Trinidadians associate overall performance with schools. Therefore if a secondary school continuously obtains high pass rates or fails to do so at CSEC examination then it can be concluded that the school determines a child’s academic outcomes. However, there are instances where students who attend “good schools” do not maintain the high standards of the school and may not perform well academically. The same applies to students who attend schools that are not classified as “prestigious” but obtain all their subjects with good scores at CXC. However, these
numbers represent a minority, and academic performance is judged based on majority performance.

**TITLE: FIGURE 4 SHOWING GENERIC RESULTS FOR QUESTION 1** Does the choice of secondary school that one attend defines one’s academic performance?

![Figure 4: Generic Results for Question 1](image)

**TITLE: FIGURE 5 SHOWING GENERIC RESULTS FOR QUESTION 2** Should the choice of secondary school that one attends define one’s academic performance?

![Figure 5: Generic Results for Question 2](image)

Question 3-5. Which secondary school did you attend? Was it easy for you to obtain employment? Do you believe that the secondary school that you attended played a role in you obtaining a/the job?
71.4% of the individuals questioned indicated that obtaining a job was not easy. Whereas, 28.6% stated that it was the contrary. Moreover, 57.1% believed that the secondary school that they attended played a role in obtaining employment. The remaining 42.9% are of the opinion that the secondary school they attended did not play a part in obtaining employment.

**Title:** Figure 6 Showing generic results for question 4. *Was it easy for you to obtain employment?*

![Pie chart showing 71.4% Yes and 28.6% No.]

**Title:** Figure 7 Showing generic results for question 5. *Do you believe that the secondary school that you attended played a role in you obtaining a/the job?*

![Pie chart showing 42.9% Yes and 57.1% No.]

21
Question 6. Do you perceive the secondary school that you attended as a prestige school?

57.1% of respondents claimed that they do not perceive their secondary school as a prestigious school. These results comprise secondary schools such as Siparia Senior Comprehensive School and Vessigny Government Secondary. Contrariwise, the remaining 42.9% believes that their school can be attributed the title of prestige school, namely; Trinity College East and St. Joseph’s Convent, St. Joseph.

Question 7. Which of the following school would you prefer your child to attend?

Participants of this questionnaire were given the choice to select one secondary school from a list of five randomly chosen secondary schools in Trinidad, namely, any of the Convents, Tranquillity Government Secondary, Bishop’s Anstey High School, Queen’s Royal College and Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive. Consequently, 85.7% selected Bishop’s Anstey High School and 14.3% selected any of the convents. The other three options were not selected.
Question 8. State one adjective or word that comes to mind as it relates to the following schools (a) Any of the convents (b) Pleasantville senior comprehensive.

This research question was geared towards obtaining a general opinion and attitudes of Trinidadians as it relates to certain secondary schools. It also attempts to find clear examples of academic labeling in secondary schools. Option (a) was described as “privileged, prestige, and good, popular, attractive”. In addition, the majority of responses applied the term “prestige/prestigious”. On the other hand, option (b) obtained descriptions such as “mediocre, non-prestigious and violence”.

The results of the questionnaires therefore establish the fact that secondary schools in Trinidad are given specific labels. These labels are identified as prestigious secondary schools and non-prestigious or government secondary schools. The findings also highlight the fact that these labels have both negative and positive effects on students and in general the alumni body.
Discussion

As previously established, the two main labels applied to secondary schools in Trinidad are prestigious and non-prestigious/government schools. The major difference is rooted on the basis of effectiveness. Secondary schools which adhere to the basic components which comprise an effective institution are deemed to have prestige. More precisely, effective secondary schools are student-centered, develop and deliver academically rich programs for their students, provide instruction and promote student learning, have a healthy school climate, foster collegial interaction, have extensive and ongoing staff development, practice shared leadership, foster creative problem solving, and involves parents and the community (Raymond S. Hackett).

Many Trinidadians are aware of the distinctions made between these two broad types of secondary schools. However, it is usually the norm for them to associate the idea of prestige with academia, thus ignoring the other aspects as exemplified in the aforementioned notion of effectiveness. Respondents of the second questionnaire were capable of distinguishing whether or not the secondary school that they attended is a prestige school. This can be related to primarily two factors. The first of these factors are based upon societal stigma and the second based on personal experiences. If the majority of Trinidadians express similar opinions about an institution it is most likely that the expressed opinion filters through and impacts the perceptions of the student and alumni body. To further add to this situation, representatives of the ministry of education and the relative governing bodies of denominational boards tend to convey the idea that some schools are better than others. This idea translates into a psychological phenomenon especially in the case of prospective secondary school students. When a student is assigned a
secondary school because of his or her performance at SEA, depending on the school, the mental and physical attitudes of that child will begin to alter. He/she will either demonstrate high levels of confidence in the event that they will be attending a prestige school. On the other hand, he/she will begin to feel inferior to those who would have gotten into the prestige school. Secondly, based on the experiences of a student at a particular secondary school, they themselves make the prestige vs. non-prestige distinction. If teachers do not take keen interest in their students, the school fails to obtain government scholarships or fails to have a pass rate of over 80% and does not contain strict rules, then these schools fall in the non-prestigious category. But the distinction is highly linked to comparisons. School A is compared to school B on every level. This aids in classifications. And as clearly stated in the literature review, the educational history of Trinidad has laid the foundation for these occurrences. One prime instance of this is exemplified by the student of ASJA who clearly demonstrates his disinterest in his secondary school. His ideal was to attend the Queen’s Royal College, however due to his low results at SEA he fell victim to the placement system. Therefore, this process of “othering” is very critical with labels, for it is in defining the “other” and accepting being the “other” that you begin to define and “other” yourself (Frantz Fanon).

Moreover, from the proposed list of secondary schools in both questionnaires, more specifically the convents, Bishop’s Anstey high school East and Trinity College East, Queen’s Royal College, St. James Government Secondary, Tranquillity Government Secondary School and Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive; it is evident that Trinidadians tend to shift towards the first three options rather than the latter three. Why is this so? What is so special about these schools? What do these schools have in common that makes them different from the rest?
Stemming from the responses, it is not only based on academics but also there are indications of social class. It is usually the case that the three main class divisions are capable of frequenting the prestige schools, however, the lower classes and to an extent the middle classes can be found among the non-prestige schools. It is however rare that a child of the upper class attends a non-prestige school. In the event that this occurs, the students are usually transferred out of that institution and into one of higher prestige. Transferring usually takes place, when parents or guardians meet with the principal of the target school and seek to gain access into the school. In addition, it appears that the prestige schools have another commonality which is denomination. Although this notion does not hold for all the schools, the three exemplified in the questionnaires as prestige tend to have more structure, and a strong sense of identity. In the past, religion was a defining factor for choosing a secondary school, but in recent years mixing has occurred, resulting in for example Hindus attending Catholic or Anglican secondary schools. It is important to note that in these prestige schools the level of mixing on the religious level does not impact or reduce the prestige of the institution. This is so because each student recognizes the value of the institution and prefers to be associated with prestige than to reduce the status of the institution which “defines them”.

Although arguable, both the self-fulfilling prophecy and the Pygmalion effect are present in the education system of Trinidad. Firstly, one of the reasons why it is difficult for the “non-prestige” schools to attain the level of prestige is due to the acceptance of the labels by both teaching staff and students. The example of the student from ASJA can be reiterated here again as he identifies the lack of prestige in his school, expressing the sentiment of disassociation. Consequently, this will hinder his motivation to excel. Furthermore, being grouped among those
who share the same level of learning does not necessarily stimulate the need to excel. One of the respondents also indicated the important role that teachers/educators play in the development and success of students. The presence and motivation of teachers pushes the students to recognize their importance in any educational institution. The lack thereof, demonstrates to the students that they have no interest in their development and also creates unstable and ineffective secondary schools. In addition, the students of the non-prestige or government secondary schools tend to create a strong tie amongst themselves as a means of distinguishing themselves from the others and also as a symbol of solidarity. A lack in a positive secondary school, which should be exemplified by the teachers, will result in students creating their own standards and identity. Thus, if a school is known for violence, then their image stands out to the new students who in most instances adopt the same trends. Bad habits are difficult to break, however, if the government, staff, parents and the wider community attempt to put strict rules and regulations in place, as well as follow through with these laws the education system of Trinidad can begin to alter and consequently can result in safer and more academically stimulating environments for all.

More positively, the prestige labels attached to certain secondary schools can have positive impacts on the students. With the environment and emphasis placed on learning, these students are pushed to attain success. Even within these institutions there exist varying learning abilities, but acknowledging that they are amongst some of the intelligent students, pushes those who are smart but not as intelligent, to try to become just as good as their classmates or schoolmates.
On the other hand, many students do not conform to the norms of a secondary school, in the event that the school is labeled as non-prestigious. Instead these students are (self-) motivated and attain good grades. It is imperative to understand that some of the students who attend these government secondary schools are intelligent. However, they face numerous problems with emotions during exams which will determine not only interior assessments but also those that will determine their secondary schooling. These issues include anxiety and nervousness among others. In addition, lack of parental support and, pressure exercised by some parents towards their children’s success as well as other socio-economic and financial factors can contribute to the difficulties encountered by students before, during and after examinations. As a result, it is evident that examinations are not the most suitable or appropriate means for assessing the academic abilities of students.

Although some respondents believed that the choice of secondary school attended does not have future implications on employment, the remaining respondents perceived that there is a direct link between the two. On further analysis it appears that the cause of this perception is based on the fact that some of these individuals did not pursue their studies after secondary schooling (eg. The University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago). Moreover, they did not attend a prestige school. On the other hand, the notion of obtaining a job is problematic, in that, apart from the requests for experience from employers, Trinidadians also make distinctions between the types of jobs that they should frequent. For instance being a cleaner is considered a less prestigious occupation than being a lawyer or doctor. They therefore seek to obtain ideal jobs or professions which suit their qualifications.
Conclusion:

Identifying and analyzing the major labels that are attached to secondary schools, along with the possible effects and future ramifications of such labels on the students who attend these secondary schools formed an intrinsic part of this study. It is undeniable that citizens of Trinidad associate secondary schools with specific labels. Two of which are the most prominent. These classifications not only serve as a means of boosting confidence but can have serious repercussions on students. The act of labeling exceeds that of simply attaching a name, but also carries with it psychological implications on the students who are assigned to these secondary schools. Accessing literature based on Trinidad for this research paper constituted a major obstacle. However, this study can facilitate future researchers and policy makers in their attempts to construct effective secondary schools. In addition, emphasis must be made on developing alternative methods of testing, to take into consideration the anxieties that students encounter. Furthermore, examinations are not the ideal methods for assessing the learning abilities of students, especially when these examinations serve as determining factors. Since universal education plays a crucial role in society, why not engage in research that can aid in both creating better educational environments and developing more suitable forms of assessment?
Works Cited

“All 'Prestige' school grads are achievers.” Daily Express, 17 Jan. 2012,

www.trinidadexpress.com/letters/All__prestige__school_grads_are_achievers-

Antoine, Sharla, and Shahiba Ali. “TRANSFER AND TRANSITIONING: Students’
Experiences in a Secondary School in Trinidad and Tobago.” The University of the West

School Choice in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.” The University of the West

Ercole, Jacqueline. “Labeling in the Classroom: Teacher Expectations and their Effects on

Brewster, Jolisa. "Compre vs. Prestige: Did the Type of Secondary School You attended

http://www.outlish.com/compre-vs-prestige-did-the-type-of-secondary-school-you-
attended-matter/.


Hackett, Raymond S. "Prestige Schools – Myth or Reality." School of Education, UWI,


Appendix

Questionnaire 1
Academic Labeling in Secondary Schools in Trinidad

Good day,
I am a final year student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and I am currently working on my thesis which seeks to identify aspects of academic labeling in Secondary Schools in Trinidad. I would be grateful if you could assist me in completing this very short and confidential questionnaire.
Thanking you in advance for your participation.
K. Williams

Age
- 13-16
- 17-19

Gender
- Male
- Female

Name of Secondary school___________________________________________

Was this school your first choice?
- Yes
- No

Why did you (choose to) attend this school?

Was your choice of secondary school influenced by anyone? Please state relation (eg. Mother, friends, primary school teacher)

If you had a choice to attend any of the following schools listed below which would you choose?(NB. if your school is listed, do not select it)
- Any of the convents
- Bishop's Anstey High school East & Trinity College East
- Queen's Royal College
- St. James Government Secondary
- Tranquillity Government Secondary

Why did you select the secondary school above and not the others?
What are the benefits of attending your secondary school?

__________________________________________

**Questionnaire**
Academic Labeling in Secondary Schools in Trinidad

Good day,
I am a final year student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and I am currently working on my thesis which seeks to identify aspects of academic labeling in Secondary Schools in Trinidad. I would be grateful if you could assist me in completing this very short and confidential questionnaire.
Thanking you in advance for your participation.
K. Williams

Age
- 19-25
- 26-32
- 33 and over

Gender
- Male
- Female

Current occupation

Does the choice of Secondary school that one attends define one's academic performance?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Should the choice of Secondary school that one attends define one's academic performance?
- Yes
- No

Which Secondary school did you attend?

Was it easy for you to obtain employment?
- Yes
- No

Do you believe that the secondary school that you attended played a role in you obtaining a/the job?
- Yes
- No
Do you perceive the Secondary school that you attended as a prestige school?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following schools would you prefer your child to attend?

- Any of the Convents
- Tranquillity Government Secondary
- Bishop's Anstey High School
- Queen's Royal College
- Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive

State one adjective/word that comes to mind as it relates to the following schools. (a) Any of the Convents,(b) Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive.