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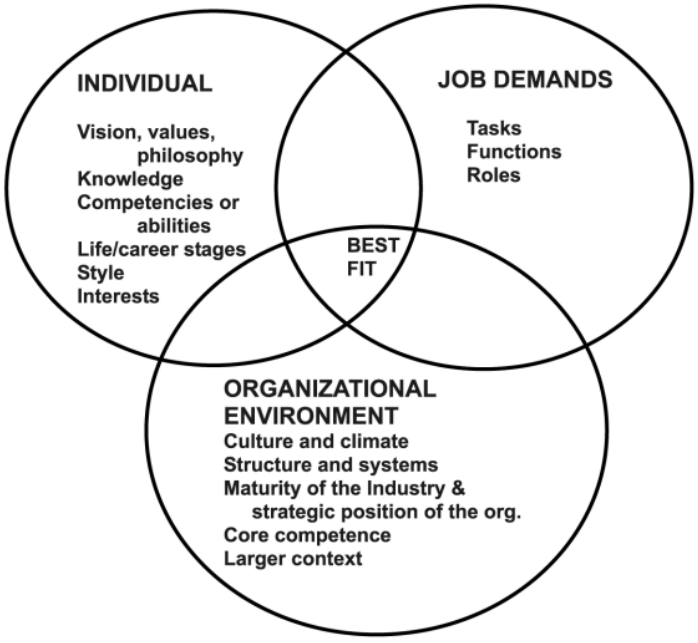
THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS ON FEMALE ENROLLMENT IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY

Saada Mubarak Mohammed Bin Amro



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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Policy Studies in Education

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Cover: Theory of Action and Job Performance

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I, Saada Mubarak Mohammed Bin Amro, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the author of this dissertation entitled "*The Impact of Internal and External Factors on Female Enrollment in One of the Vocational Training Institutes in the UAE: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study*", hereby, solemnly declare this is the original research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. Mohamed Alhosani, in the College of Education at UAEU. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma or a similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my dissertation have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation and/or publication of this dissertation.

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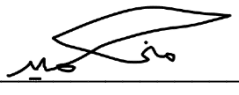
   Signature:  Date: 25/11/2022

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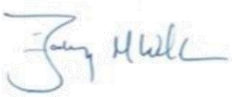
   Signature:  Date: 25/11/2022

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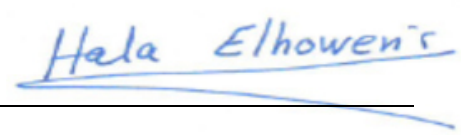
Signature 

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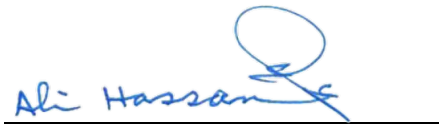
Signature 

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Abstract

Educational institutes around the world and vocational training institutes, in particular, are concerned with students' participation and enrollment rates. Great emphasis is placed on the vocational sector and its role in establishing a knowledge-based economy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as articulated in the UAE Vision 2021, its economic foresight 2030, and in the recent 50th-anniversary statement released in 2019 by HH Mohammed Rashed Al Maktoum. The importance of this sector is its significance in diversifying the economy, providing employment, and equipping both employed and unemployed nationals with the vocational skills required by local and international markets and industries. This study explores the external and internal factors that impact particularly female students' enrollment rates in one vocational education and training institute in the UAE. A qualitative phenomenological approach is employed to explore the essence of the lived experiences of the students and staff in the institute under study. A total of 24 interviews are conducted with 14 female students and with 10 administrators and instructors. The findings indicate that internal factors are categorized under: campus environment, learning experiences, relationship with administrators and instructors while external factors categorized under: knowing about the institute, location of the institute, previous school and enrollment experiences and purpose of studying.

Keywords: Vocational Enrollment, Vocational Education and Training, Internal and External Factors, Female, Gender Equality, UAE, Qualitative, Phenomenology.

Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

العوامل التي تؤثر على إلتحاق الطلبة الإناث بأحد معاهد التعليم والتدريب المهني في الإمارات: دراسة ظاهرية نوعية

الملخص

دائماً ماتهتم المؤسسات التعليمية بشكل عام ومعاهد التدريب المهني على وجه الخصوص في جميع أنحاء العالم بمعدلات إلتحاق الطلبة حيث يتم التركيز بشكل كبير على هذا القطاع ودوره في تأسيس اقتصاد قائم على المعرفة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، كما هو مذكور في رؤية 2021 والرؤية الاقتصادية 2030 ووثيقة الخمسين الصادرة عام 2019 من قبل الشيخ محمد بن راشد آل مكتوم. وتعزى أهمية هذا القطاع إلى أهميته في تنويع الاقتصاد، وتوفير فرص العمل وفي إعداد المواطنين العاملين والعاطلين على حد سواء لتزويدهم بالمهارات المهنية التي يتطلبها سوق العمل والصناعات المحلية. في هذه الدراسة، سيتم دراسة العوامل الخارجية والداخلية التي تعزز معدلات التحاق الطالبات على وجه التحديد في أحد معاهد التدريب والتعليم المهني في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. تم اختيار الطالبات للدراسة بسبب الوضع التاريخي الفريد للمرأة وما تبعه من مبادرات للمساواة بين الجنسين في جميع أنحاء العالم وفي دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة على وجه الخصوص. والأهم من ذلك حقيقة أن درجة التطور في أي مجتمع تقاس في المقام الأول بدرجة تمكين المرأة. تم استخدام منهج الظواهر النوعية لاستكشاف التجارب الحية لمجموعة من الطالبات والموظفين في المعهد المهني قيد الدراسة. وبناءاً تم إجراء 24 مقابلة: 14 من الطالبات 10 من الموظفين الإداريين والأكاديميين. تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى العوامل الداخلية تصنف تحت: بيئة الحرم الجامعي، وخبرات التعلم، والعلاقة مع الإدرايين والمدرسين، بينما تصنف العوامل الخارجية تحت: كيفية المعرفة عن المعهد قبل الإلتحاق، وموقع المعهد، الخبرات السابقة في الإلتحاق في الكليات أو الجامعات، والغرض من الدراسة.

مفاهيم البحث الرئيسية: الإلتحاق المهني، التعليم والتدريب المهني، العوامل الداخلية والخارجية، الإناث، العدل بين الجنسين، دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، النوعي، الظواهري

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Last but not least, special thanks go to my parents, my lovely son and my siblings who provided me with the ideal environment along the way and for their patience and understanding when I was not around. I hope I will be able to make it up to them.

Dedication

To the little brave boy running, holding a wooden stick in his hand
not allowing visitors to enter his village
not until they write few words on the sand
no he won't surrender, he won't budge
writing them over and over with the wood stick in his hand
that's how he learned writing... in the sands of his village

To my father, the closest person to my heart, who taught me that learning has no limits

إلى ذلك الطفل المشاكس الذي يركض وبيده العصا

لا أحد يمكنه الدخول من الزوار

ليس قبل أن يكتبوا بضع كلمات على الثرى

فيعيد كتابتها مرة تلو الآخرى بإصرار

هكذا تعلم أبي..كيف يكتب الكلمات ويتهجى

إلى أبي، الأقرب إلى قلبي، الذي علمني بأن التعلم لا حدود له

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List of Abbreviations

ACT	Accounting
ACTVET	Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ADCO	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Counsel
BPH	Department of Education and Knowledge
ADMA	Abu Dhabi Marine Operating Company
ADNOC	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
ADPOLY	Abu Dhabi Polytechnic
ADU	Abu Dhabi University
ADVETI	Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute
AM	Academic Manager
AS	Active Student
ATHS	Applied Technology High School
ATI	ADNOC Technical Institute
AUST	Ajman University of Science and Technology
C	Current Student
CAA	Commission for Academic Accreditation
CCNA	Cisco Certified Network Associate
CEPA	Common Educational Proficiency Assessment
CIS	Computer/Internet Self-efficacy
CTE	Career and Technical Education
DAE	Dubai Aerospace Enterprise
DEC	Dubai Education Council
EFA	Education for All
EFT	European Training Foundation
EHS	Environmental, Health and Safety
EmSAT	Emirates Standardized Test
ETM	Mechanical Engineering
FA	Failure due to Attendance
FAHR	Federal Authority for Government Human Resources
FCHS	Fatima College for Health Sciences

FDF	Family Development Foundation
G	Graduate
GAP	gender action plan
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPA	Grade Point Average
GPD	Gross Domestic Product
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
H1	Head teacher 1
H2	Head teacher 2
HCT	Higher Colleges of Technology
HHH	Happy Household Section
HR	Human Resource
HRA	Human Resources Authority
IAT	Institute of Applied Technology
ICDL	International Computer Driving License
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ITE	Institute of Technical Education
KBE	Knowledge-Based Economy
KE	Knowledge Economy
KG	Kindergarten
KHDA	The Knowledge and Human Development Authority
LMICs	Low and Middle-Income Countries
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIS	Management Information System
MOE	Ministry of Education
NAPO	National Admissions and Placement Office
NIVE	National Institute for Vocational Education

NQ+NOSS	National Qualifications based on National Occupational Skills Standards
NQA	National Qualification Authority
NSM	New School Model
OCS	Online Communication Self-efficacy
OLR	Online Learning Readiness
PI	The Petroleum Institute
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDG4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
STE	Science, Technology, and Engineering
STS	Secondary Technical School
TANMIA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the National Human Resources Development and Employment Authority
TELS	Teacher and Educational Leadership Standards
TLA	Technical Laboratory Analysis
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAEU	United Arab Emirates University
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VEDC	Vocational Education Development Centre
VETAC	Vocational Education and Training Awards Council

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

> *The society which scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy: neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.*
>
> — John W. Gardner

This dissertation is about vocational education, which is sometimes referred to as vocational training. More specifically, situated within the UAE, the dissertation is about the internal and the external factors that either attract students, especially females, or shun them away from vocational education. Why do these students choose vocational education, what keeps them motivated in studying at a vocational education and training institute, and why some students decide not to continue in this line of education? These are the questions that guide the current research and which the dissertation hopes to answer.

According to Billett (2011), vocational education "takes many different forms" and is probably the least unitary of educational sectors (p. vii). This is because it means different things to different people. Some people see vocational education as a distinct sector of education separate from both schooling and university sectors; while others see it as internal to high schools or as separate high schools and overall "positioned as being a strand for those students who are not headed for university entrance" (Billett, 2011, p. vii). In some cases, Billett explains, vocational education is designed for high school leavers as a way to give them a vocation that enhances their employability or to develop what Schultz (1981) calls 'human capital.'

Located in the UAE, the researcher's aim in this dissertation is to look at the current situation, approach and definition of vocational education in the UAE with special interest in answering this broad question: Why some students attend vocational education, why they stay in it and why they leave? To answer this question, the dissertation is conceptually located within a human capital and gender equality/equity theoretical frameworks. Human capital theory helps the reader to understand the socio-

political context and the way decision-makers in the UAE form educational policies and how these decision-makers think about human capital, which is reflected in their initiatives and investments while gender equality/equity theory helps to understand the urgency of giving females equal and fair access to education in general and vocational education in particular.

The first theoretical framework that this dissertation is guided by is the human capital theory. Human capital theory is interpreted by economists in general as a combined set of models related to human behavior and social methods. Each of the pioneers—including Theodore Schultz, Gary Becker, and Jacob Mincer—tackled a different aspect of human capital theory. For example, Mincer concentrated on the income distribution resulting from human capital ROI; Becker focused on human agent investment and the optimization of individuals; and Schultz emphasized the positive correlation between investment in human capital and aggregate economic growth (Houghton, 2017).

The foundation for the term "human capital" appeared in 1961 when Theodore Schultz first proposed that it incorporates the "knowledge, skills and abilities of the people employed in an organization." (Schultz, 1961, p. 140). Although this definition is brief and to the point, it is also limited and does not address that humans possess monetary value or that investment in human capital is significant. Schultz, however, revised this definition in 1981, adding that human capital includes "…all human abilities to be either innate or acquired. Attributes … which are valuable and can be augmented by appropriate investment will be human capital" (Schultz, 1981, p. 24; for further discussion on Schultz's definition, see Marginson, 1993). In 1993, Becker and Murphy defined human capital in a similar way but added the element of the "health of individuals" (Becker & Murphy, 1993). Certainly, the health and well-being of individuals is of significance, and this is supported by research, which takes into consideration the organizational context. Subsequently, Bontis et al. (1999) added the elements of innovation, change, and creativity to the definition and emphasized that motivation acts as fuel for these capabilities which is part of the "intellectual capital" that will be discussed later in the literature review chapter.

Bontis et al. (1999) also recognized the idea of “distinctive character” representing the organization as a whole and referred to the “long-term survival of the organization,” which is the sustainability of the business. Dess and Picken (1999) proposed that human capital encompasses “the individual capabilities, tacit knowledge, skills, and experience of the organization's managers and employees… focused primarily on capabilities, knowledge, skills, and experience, all of them embodied in and inseparable from the individual” (p. 11 & 13). Thomas et al. (2013) agreed with the above in defining human capital as “people, their performance and their potential in the organization,” emphasizing the idea that an employee’s potential is achieved through the constant development of knowledge and skills (p. 3).

Gender equality (or equity) is the second theoretical framework that guides this dissertation. Understanding the historical roots of gender roles and how they are formed and reflected in individual’s education and career choices is essential in the formation of f this study. It's crucial to first distinguish between the terms "sex" and "gender" before getting into the definition of this term. According to Bleideorn et al. (2016) "sex makes us man or woman; gender groups us as masculine or feminine." As per Wood & Eagly (2015) they refer to the gender identity as the extent with which one defines women and men. Society and culture have an impact on each individual’s perspective of roles and the characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Lindsey et al. (2011) defines gender roles as the expected behaviors related with each sex based on the culture of society. In many cultures male duties require power and aggression while feminine tend to be given duties that require nurture and care (Little, 2014). Gender equality means both males and females should have equal rights (UNICEF, 2010) while gender equity means treating them fairly but not necessary in the same way (UNICEF, 2017).

There are multiple of terms associated with gender equality, the most related one to this dissertation is the “women Empowerment” term with refers to women and girls acting freely and exercising their powers (Clinton, 2012). Recognizing that empowerment is a collective process where women take actions and being granted power is one of the major steps toward bring about change (Sahay, 1998). According to Mandal (2013) in order to achieve full women empowerment, women need to be empowered socially, educationally, economically, politically and psychologically. Gender equality

evolved as a reaction to years of inequality faced by women both in Western and Eastern cultures and not necessarily merging out of the true principles of Islam for example. To counteract gender inequity, international initiatives are in place such as Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4) (UNESCO, 2016).

Since the mid-20th century, terms such as knowledge economy (KE), knowledge-based economy (KBE), modern economy, and new economy have been globally used and emphasized because of their proclaimed importance as a means towards economic progression in all areas. The first two terms illustrate a significant aspect of the new approach, which embraces knowledge as the driving force of the economy. It is significant to note that, first, KBE has been hugely empowered by the emergence of globalization and modern technologies and that, second, it is an economy based on the idea not only of equipping people with the required skills and knowledge but also of creating, distributing, and transferring this knowledge to all the country's socio-economical aspects. In the creation of an KBE, areas such as education, science, and vocational training should be of primary focus in order to gain a competitive advantage (Hadad, 2017).

Vocational education and training institutes are ingrained in a knowledge-based economy, society and in life-long learning concepts in the form of enhanced decision-making with regards to workplace needs and requirements. These institutes provide employees and students with the necessary training to develop the skills needed by industries. Enrollment rates are key for these institutes' sustainability, and attracting local females to this sector would be of great benefit since the local males often prefer to pursue other sectors that are more favorable to them, such as the military and police. In addition, investigating the factors affecting female students' enrollment and participation can help in directing the government's efforts and investments. In this introductory chapter, and in what follows, the rationale for this study is explained, and the research questions are stated, along with the limitations of the study and definitions of terms.

Turning to the UAE context now, with a gross domestic product (GDP) ranked as the 15th highest in the world, it is considered as one of the most developed economies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, largely attributable to its abundant oil and gas reserves. However, it is inevitable that these resources are finite and might run out one day, which is why the UAE is eager to invest in building a sophisticated, knowledge-based economy. Ensuring that all its citizens have access to employment is part of the UAE constitution, and the government is committed in its efforts towards this goal. Moreover, "skilled human capital," or human resources, is one of the seven strategic enablers listed in the UAE Vision 2021 (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). In addition, the latest World Bank Index (which ranks countries according to their next-generation productivity levels in terms of work, health, education, and survivability), released on October 11th, 2019, ranked the UAE in 49th place (Westley, 2018).

Investing in education recognizes the importance of human capital growth and that it contributes to the economic progress of society. The UAE has launched many plans and initiatives to diversify its economy and make it more competitive, in line with its national strategy towards a more knowledge-based economy that is less reliant on oil. This has led the UAE to look for the skillsets, knowledge, and abilities needed by industries in order to train students and employees accordingly.

Since the union of the seven emirates, the UAE's leaders have emphasized education in order to have a strong, economically independent nation. For example, proclamations of the founding leader of the UAE, Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, on the importance of education are frequently recited and celebrated by his people. In line with the views of economists and social scientists, he understood that education is an investment in human capital that benefits not only individuals, but all of society. Shaikh Zayed considered human capital a top priority and believed that people are vital in sustaining any country's development. This was reflected in his focus on investing in the educational sector to utilize human resources to the benefit of the country, with a focus on religious teaching in the beginning. Shaikh Zayed built a strong foundation with his inspiring vision, patience and leadership, which helped the UAE to meet internal and external challenges, stand out internationally, and become the only successful federation in the Arab world (Yakheek, 2003).

The UAE places great emphasis on providing its citizens with an education that aligns with world-class standards. Consequently, in 2016, the government allocated 21.2% of its federal budget to the education sector in addition to encouraging teacher accreditation and development, enhancing smart learning programs, and revitalizing the curricula (United Arab Emirates Education, 2018). The Ministry of Education (MoE), working with the Abu Dhabi Education Counsel (ADEC), now the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET), and the Institute of Applied Technology (IAT), has released a five-year plan of Teacher and Educational Leadership Standards (TELS) as a teacher-licensing program for all teachers across the UAE (United Arab Emirates Education, 2018).

In line with the UAE's economic vision of 2030, which is considered a road map for all emirates, upgrading the skillsets of the national workforce will lead to improvements in overall productivity levels, which can only be achieved by placing more emphasis on vocational training. The most recognizable initiative in this regard is the establishment of the Vocational Education and Training Award Council (VETAC) under the umbrella of the National Qualification Authority (NQA) with the aim to build Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system that meets the needs of the job market, identify and develop occupational skills and work performance requirements, and providing the public with information about career projections. There are plans to improve quality assurance procedures of recognizing foreign qualifications (National Qualifications Authority, 2018).

After the industrial upheaval in the UAE following the discovery of oil, and to keep up with the rapid development and the high demand for skills that were not locally available, the government had to rely on foreign laborers. Manual jobs with low wages were not attractive to the nationals, who preferred jobs with higher wages and benefits (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). According to Alzaabi (2012) recommendations, the job market has to be studied in order to recognize its needs and prepare well-trained and qualified local labor, improve the education curriculum with a focus on vocational training, recognize foreign labor impact on national security and raise awareness amongst nationals of work ethics and values. On the other hand, Bin-Obaid (2003)

indicates that both foreign and local laborers complement each other with the former compensating for the latter lack of skills. He recommends to place more importance on providing national laborers with more education and training.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As already cited, situated within the UAE, focusing on female students, and being one of a handful of studies on the topic, the current study critically investigates the factors that attract female students to vocational education, the factors that keep them in vocational education and the factors that push them away from vocational education.

So far in the researcher's attempt to search for previous literature, there seems to be a dearth of studies on vocational education in the UAE, especially ones that focus on Emirati female students. In a time of globalization and international competitiveness, if the UAE is to take its right place in the international scene, this current research is arguing, it has to pay very close attention to vocational education, with special interest on female students. Here, there is a pressing need to investigate the factors that affect female students' enrollment rates in vocational training and education in order to gain a better understanding of the issues contributing to female student enrollment rates. As I will show later, it is imperative that educational institutes strive to attract female students to enroll as well as to say actively engaged until, graduation, as these students are assets that draw needed revenue and profit.

All private and public educational organizations regardless of the type of certificates they provide, whether traditional or online focus and depend mainly on increasing their enrollment and participation rates and on preparing their students to study and complete their programs. The success of these organizations is determined not only by the size of their students' population but also by the quality of their program. This is why educational leaders have to constantly evaluate the educational climate they create, which attract, keep or push away students.

The researcher choice of female students to study is congruent with the UAE government vision as Shaikh Zayed (may Allah have mercy upon him) focused on women's issues. He asserted that women are the fundamental pillar of society, an

attitude that is supported by Islam principles and showcased in one of his famous statements in 1974: “I am looking forward to a time when UAE women will fulfill their obligations towards upgrading our society as their peers in many Arab countries have already done. They should also contribute to the development of individuals in line with the teachings of Islam and preserve the UAE’s heritage and tradition, for it will lead us to prosperity.” Shaikh Zayed’s words were translated into action, as the number of employed women in the UAE tripled between 1980 and 1990, mostly in the public sector, and they were the first women in the gulf region to join the military as well (Yakheek, 2003).

Generally speaking, from the participants’ point of view (composed of both students and staff), the study investigates the internal as well as the external factors that affect female enrollment in one vocational education and training in the UAE. Moreover, it critically examines the policy and program overlaps, dysfunctional elements of the institutes, effects of the internal and external environments, and institutions’ inputs and outputs and how they are processed (i.e. made sense of) and eventually transformed.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

For the purpose of this study, it is worth noting that three important consequences resulted from the surge in the oil economy: youth unemployment, low workforce participation among UAE nationals in the private sector and in technical jobs, and an overall low participation of women in the UAE workforce. The mass importation of laborers to service the oil industry led to their assuming the majority of jobs (especially technical and manual jobs) and a high rate of unemployment among young nationals. According to a 2009 labor force survey, only 54% of nationals were participating in the workforce, with 85% of these in the public sector. As for women, whether expatriates or nationals, who form 30% of the total UAE population, only 42% of them were participating in the workforce (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). However, the UAE government has made considerable strides throughout the years in supporting and protecting women in the workplace. The UAE Constitution grants women equal pay to their national male counterparts. Women also have equal access to health and social

benefits, education, and jobs among other policies and initiatives to ensure and promote gender equity (UAE Government Portal, 2021).

Governmental investment intended to improve higher education institutions and technical schools has been based on the UAE's and other Gulf countries' realizations of the importance of talent management and development. Therefore, educational efforts have been reformed with the recognition that national graduates have inadequate work-life preparation in that they lack market-oriented skills, English language skills, relevant work experience, and vocational motivation (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). Based on Hassock (2019) findings, in order to improve UAE graduates' employability, there should be more focus on improving their soft skills, work attitudes, life-long learning mindset, interview preparation, enhancing work placement programs and enriching productive collaboration from all stakeholders.

The UAE government has long been concerned with the education of its citizens and their provision of sufficient living standards. The late H. H. Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding leader, emphasized the importance of personal and professional human development and of providing equitable opportunities for accessing education and employment, especially for women.

Vocational education and training institutes are ingrained in a knowledge-based economy, society and in life-long learning concepts in the form of enhanced decision-making with regards to workplace needs and requirements. These institutes provide employees and students with the necessary training to develop the skills needed by industries. Enrollment rates are key for these institutes' sustainability, and attracting local females to this sector would be of great benefit since the local males often prefer to pursue other sectors that are more favorable to them, such as the military and police. In addition, investigating the factors affecting female students' enrollment and participation can help in directing the government's efforts and investments.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed by this study:

1. From the participants' perspective, what are the significant internal factors that impact female enrollment in vocational education and training institutes in the UAE?
2. From the participants' perspective, what are the significant external factors that impact female enrollment in vocational education and training institutes in the UAE?
3. From the participants' perspective, how can female enrollment in vocational education and training institutes in the UAE be increased?

1.5 Significance of the Study

To see not only the significance of the current study but also its urgency, looking at the three tables below is proposed. The statistics for these tables were taken out of the vocational educational and training institute where the study was conducted. Clearly, at the end of each term, a statistically significant number of female students becomes inactive, either by being absent until they fail or by withdrawing for a variety of reasons. For example, in term 1 of the 2018–2019 academic year (see Table 1), around 21% of the students become inactive, while in term 2 of the 2018–2019 academic year (see Table 2), around 15% of them become inactive. In Table 3, this pattern of inactivity (i.e. FA, WD, Etc.) reoccurs.

Table 1: Term 1: 2018–2019 (201910)

Overall Number of Female Students	Active Female Students	Inactive Female Students			
552	448	104			
		Exit Foundation Program (EX)	No Show (NS)	Failure due to attendance (FA)	Withdrawn (WD)
		4	4	47	49

Table 2: Term 2: 2018–2019 (201920)

Overall Number of Female Students	Active Female Students	Inactive Female Students			
431	371	59			
		Exit Foundation Program (EX)	No Show (NS)	Failure due to attendance (FA)	Withdrawn (WD)
		1	0	2	56

Table 3: Term 3: 2018–2019 (201930)

Overall Number of Female Students	Active Female Students	Inactive Female Students			
400	326	63			
		Exit Foundation Program (EX)	No Show (NS)	Failure due to attendance (FA)	Withdrawn (WD)
		3	0	2	58

The aim of the current study is to look at the reasons and factors for why female students stay, become absent or completely drop out. Here, the researcher hopes to identify the factors that hold more weight than others in determining why students stay or drop out to help policymakers understand which areas need more focus, so that greater efforts can be directed towards these. Determining and weighing the degrees of contribution of these factors will provide a clearer picture and focus for administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders in vocational education and training institutes and will help them determine what they can and cannot control in order to avoid wasting significant effort in areas that have proven to be less controllable or determinant.

Overall, this study will be of considerable significance, as few studies to date have tackled the factors that affect female students' enrollment in vocational education, in general, and in the UAE context, in particular. Therefore, this study will fill a major gap in the literature and add to our understanding for why female students stay, become absent or drop out of vocational education and training.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Human capital: Both Dictionary of Economics (Bateman & McAdam, 2006) and The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics (Durlauf & Blume, 2016) have similar definitions of human capital as they define it in simple words as the total of skills and talents which produces knowledge that could be developed by training and that humans have “production capacity” brining about more income to the economy. Economists view human capital as models related to human behavior and each of the pioneers in this field addressed a component of it. Mincer focused on income distribution, Becker on human agent investment and Schultz on positive correlation between human capital investment and economic growth (Houghton, 2017). The phrase "human capital" was initially coined in 1961 whose definition though concise, it was also limiting and ignores the fact that human capital investment is critical. He later improved this definition in the 1980s and added that human capital refers to skills and talents that are deemed beneficial and could be increased by proper investment (Schultz 1981, p. 24; for further discussion on Schultz’s definition, see Marginson, 1993). Becker (1993) emphasized the importance of individual’s health and well-being while Bontis et al. (1999) stressed the importance of innovation and change as part of intellectual capital. Dess and Picken (1999) also viewed all capacities of all individuals in the organizations such as knowledge, skills and experiences of an organizations’ employees and managers are what constitutes human capital.

Skills mismatch: Skills mismatch refers the gap between the supply and demand for skills at the macro level, while it happens when workers have skills that are different from what is required (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021). Factors behind skills mismatch include slow adaptability of education and training systems to the economic changes and low labor mobility across economic due to cultural barrier, information asymmetries and deficiencies in public policies among others. forms of skills mismatch include skills shortage, qualification mismatch, over or under qualifications, skills gap and over or under skilling (Nikolov et al., 2018). Skills mismatches, gaps or shortages have a negative impact on labor production and hinder innovation and technological advancement. Not having the right skills subject individuals subject to unemployment and means unfilled positions or having workings with inadequate skills in organizations.

Costs include low wages, low productivity and high training costs (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021).

National Qualification Authority (NQA): NQA was established in 2010 with the aim to provide Emirati nationals with quality education and training by implementing quality assurance processes. One of its key goals is to assist the UAE to keep pace with global scientific and technological advancement and at the same time meeting economic and social demands of the country (National Qualifications Authority, 2014). Some of the main Objects of NQA set by the ministerial decree include establishment of qualification framework for the Emirates as a national frame of reference, designing unified policies and national strategy for qualifications, maintaining standards for higher education, general and technical, vocational and professional education, developing and maintaining assessment of outcomes processes and procedures, encourage entities to promote life-long learning and developing and maintaining an integrated system to license assessors. Other roles and responsibilities are constructing a VET framework capable of ensuring the quality of professional capabilities that meet industry criteria and labor market needs for a trained workforce. Establishing partnerships with industries that focus on developing and endorsing national qualifications based on the National Occupational Skills Standards (NQ+NOSS), aligning foreign vocational qualifications with QFEmirates, and maintaining an awarding bodies' system (National Qualifications Authority, 2012).

The New School Model (NSM): NSM which was first initiate in 2010 and now includes grade 10, is a learner-centered approach to education that encourages learner autonomy and critical thinking. The NSM embeds continued professional development for teachers and school leaders as an essential factor for educational development (Warner, 2018). It is a comprehensive reform which encompasses all areas of education from curriculum, assessment, teaching methods, environment, resources and physical education. It is essential to NSM to standardize all these areas across all ADEC schools and to foster a child-centered learning environment. This model which is based on "whole child philosophy" seeks to develop lifelong learnings and is concerned with the learners' social-emotional, cognitive, language and physical learning aspects (Council, 2010). NSM aim to improve teachers' professional development and to establish a

comprehensive teaching and learning and in K-12. Due to its success, the MoE and ADEC decided to spread this model to all the UAE. The main aspects of this model include: decentralization of the education system, granting schools autonomy and thus empowering them and empathizing a student-centered approach to teaching and learning. The most important objectives of the NSM project are to adapt the curriculum to suit new socioeconomic developments, develop teachers and school leaders, and improve students' English language and math skills. The most important objectives of the NSM project are to adapt the curriculum to suit new socioeconomic developments, develop teachers and school leaders, and improve students' English language and math skills (Azaza, 2018).

Gender equality: Gender equality refers to the idea that women and men of all ages should have receive equal treatment, and opportunities to reach their full potential, to exercise their human rights and dignity, and to receive benefits from and give back to economic, social, cultural, and political growth. Gender equality is defined as society's equal valuation of men and women's similarities and differences, as well as the roles they play. It is founded on the equal participation of men and women in the home, community, and society. Equality does not mean that men and women will become equal, but it does mean that women and men's rights, duties, and opportunities will not be regardless of the gender they were born with. Gender equality indicates that both men and women have equal interests, needs, and priorities (UNICEF, 2017).

Transcendental phenomenology: Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodologies that seek to comprehend human experience. It is conceptual and conditioned by the omission of all preconceptions of seeing the phenomenon through a clear lens, whereby the true meaning of the phenomenon appears naturally with and within their own identity (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1977) does not assume that transcendental phenomenology is the only approach to the knowledge of human experience, but rather the science of pure possibility pursued with systematic concreteness, the science of reality. It precedes the empirical science and emphasizes making it possible. Moustakas (1994) discusses in detail the philosophical foundation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Although philosophically meaningful, the terms are somehow clearly lacking, even if

they are defined. For example, he defines "Noema" as its appearance, not the actual object. "Noesis" means how to identify or judge it.

1.5 Summary

This chapter lays the foundation of the study and familiarizes the reader with the purpose of the study. It begins by defining vocational education and training and highlighting its purpose as a starting point. The problem statement highlights what captivated the researcher into looking into the topic in the first place and the research questions serves to guide the research and narrow its focus to the participants' lived experiences with regards to internal and external factors impacting female enrollments in one of the UAE's governmental vocational education institutes in addition to their suggestions regarding this phenomenon. Human capital and gender equality were employed as the starting the theoretical frameworks from which the whole study branches out within the context of the UAE.

The next chapter offers more insights and literature review that are considered pivotal in shaping the vocational education and training around the world and in the UAE in particular.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Human Capital and Education

From the 18th century to the present—despite a two-century gap—starting from Smith's (1776) *The Wealth of Nations* book, economists were keen to develop the cognitive storage of the human capital concept. Over the years, they have also exerted substantial efforts in placing human capital theory into action. Their aim was to urge decision makers to increase their investments in projects related to school and post-school education, women's education, vocational or on-the-job training, medical care, and so on (Spengler, 1977).

Even though human capital was clearly defined in this century, its conceptualization was discussed long before that. Some of the well-known economists who discussed this concept were Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and Alfred Marshal (Sweetland, 1996). In Smith's (1776) book, *The Wealth of Nation*, he verbalized the basis of the human capital theory that was heavily discussed and debated after the Industrial Revolution. He listed human capital, along with useful machines, buildings, and land, under fixed capital. He believed that the education and skills acquired by workers must be given a real expense. Workers' talents, although considered as part of their personal investment, also contribute to the workplace and society they live in. He compared workers who gained valuable skills through experience and education as an "expensive machine[s]" that needs maintenance during their education, study, or apprenticeship (Spengler, 1977). Smith (1776) too suggested that the two main elements of human capital, quantitative and qualitative labor inputs, encompass labor skills and abilities that are acquired through fixed and realized education costs (Sweetland, 1996).

The concept of human capital was first linked to education in the mid-1960s by Schultz (1960). He suggested considering education and its expenses as investments and its outcome (tangible or intangible) as part of human capital by proposing "to treat education as an investment in man and to treat its consequences as a form of capital. Since education becomes a part of the person receiving it, I shall refer to it as human capital" (p. 571). By analyzing the costs of returns related to total costs of education and services between 1900 and 1956 in US secondary and elementary schools, he found that

the return of investment (ROI) increased over time, higher than the ROIs in physical capital. In addition to the positive cultural effects that develop competent and responsible citizens, he also emphasized the importance of the immoral aspect of treating education as merely creating capital at the expense of producing competent and responsible citizens. He strived for a balance between achieving these cultural and noble goals and improving individuals' capabilities and skills in their working lives, which will be reflected in the country's national economy (Schultz, 1960). Schultz (1960) argued that useful skills and knowledge are not only a part of capital but also have far more value than non-human or physical capital. Its growth is fundamental to economic progress. Investment in individuals takes the form of investment in education, health, and job mobility to acquire better jobs which includes on-the-job training as well. However, economists shy away from it because it is often difficult to measure (Schultz, 1961).

Correspondingly, researchers have emphasized the link between human capital and education and training, such as Mincer (1984), who studied the education ROI on human capital. He compared business investments and education investments, given that the cost of education is the time spent in school instead of work, and returns are the wages and their increases as years of work experience also increase. He found that education ROI surpasses and exceeds other business investments. According to Mincer (1984):

> *"Individuals differ in inherited and acquired abilities, but only the latter differ among countries and periods. The human capital analysis deals with acquired capacities developed through formal and informal education at school and home and training, experience, and mobility in the labor market. The central idea of the human capital theory is that whether deliberate or not, these activities involve costs and benefits and can, therefore, be analyzed as economic decisions, private, or public." (p. 3)*

Similarly, Mincer (1984) strengthened his argument to advocate the importance of investment in human capital by indicating that distinguishing between the human factor and the knowledge factor in production is critical. The knowledge factor is considered as the infrastructure of technology. He further elaborated that individuals transmit

knowledge and create new knowledge, which opens doors for innovation and technological advancement.

Bontis et al. (1999) discussed the concept related to the knowledge factor, which is the "intellectual capital." According to them, intellectual capital is the sum of all intangible resources and the interconnection of these resources. According to their definition, this includes all direct and indirect tangible resources that can be out of the organization's control, such as the goodwill of the local community, as long as the organization influences it. This feature implies vagueness of the definition, which means that every organization has its own uniqueness and specific context affecting its meaning.

At the same time, in their book *Beyond Productivity: How Leading Companies Achieve Superior Performance by Leveraging Human Capital*, Dess and Picken (1999) proposed that human capital encompasses "the individual capabilities, tacit knowledge, skills, and experience of the organization's managers and employees… focused primarily on capabilities, knowledge, skills, and experience, all of them embodied in and inseparable from the individual" (p. 11, 13). They advocated for this definition, saying that the knowledge element does not depreciate over time but instead becomes more valuable and powerful and adds to the knowledge reservoir of organizations. According to their definition, human capital includes motor skills, information-gathering skills, information-processing skills, communication skills, experience, knowledge, social skills, values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Becker (2009) viewed education and training as the most important investment in human capital. He investigated the factors affecting the ROI of training, such as mobility, age, type of training (specific or general), and time spent in training. Regarding gender, he indicated that the participation of women in the workforce increased over time, although women had less incentive to invest in their market skills than men. What distinguishes Becker from others is that he elucidated the emotional and physical health aspects of individuals and how investing in the "strength" of workers is as important to earnings as the knowledge aspect. He supported the idea that decreasing death rates is reflected in extending the earning period and that good physical and emotional health

increase productivity (Becker, 2009). Certainly, this concept of investing in individuals' emotional and physical health is beneficial especially when applied for vocational education and training learners, as these categories of students face a lot of issues related to learning difficulties and psychological and health challenges.

Thomas et al. (2013, p. 3) agreed with others in defining human capital as "people, their performance and their potential in the organization," emphasizing the idea that an employee's potential is achieved through the constant development of knowledge and skills. They emphasized that human capital is not just a group of defined skills but also the integration of these diverse skills. To be of value, these integrated skills must create value for customers and a competitive advantage that set the organization above its competitors.

However, Marginson (2019) studied the limitations of the human capital theory, which assumes that education determines the marginal productivity of laborers. He said that human capital theory fails the "realism test." This notion is due to the methodological defects that utilize a single universal theoretical lens, which ignores the fact that multiple truths and not just one closed system modeling exist; while all social systems are at least partially open, the incorrect usage of mathematical tools, in particular, is related to the multivariate analysis of interdependent variables. The complex route between heterogeneous education and jobs is imposed by human capital theory as a single linear channel. It cannot explain how education increases productivity, why wages have become more uneven, or the significance of social standing. According to Marginson (2019), the human capital theory has disrupted the possibility of having other social and educational theories that can better explain and reflect the complexity of the real world of work and education. Regardless of these opposing views, and even though the term "human capital investment" was once ridiculed and sparked ethical disputes—since it was perceived as treating people as slaves or machines—it is now widely accepted. The human capital theory has faced many criticisms since its early beginnings until now; however, it has survived and even expanded to many fields, such as economics, education, and sociology.

Notwithstanding these scholars' different arguments and ideas, they have all agreed that investment in education and training is economically beneficial to both the individual and society. Although human capital includes health and nutrition, education may be at the center of human capital investment. Education includes formalized education from primary to secondary school, informal education, on-the-job training, and specialized vocational education. To increase the results of investment, Corazzini (1967) suggested what the best time is to begin vocational education. He examined the costs and benefits of public and private vocational training programs. The opportunity costs of the two programs were compared with the lifetime income increase upon completing these programs. One of these programs was implemented at the high school level, whereas the other was at the post-high school level. The findings revealed that post-high school students make poor choices if they choose to train in the same programs selected by high school students. The ROI yields more results if the post-high school students select semi-professional training in their thirteenth and fourteenth years of study.

2.2 Gender Equality

Before delving into explaining the meaning and ramifications of gender equity or equality and gender inequality and other terms associated with these concepts, providing a brief background of the meanings of the terms "gender," "sex," and "gender roles" through biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural lenses is useful.

Psychologists and sociologists have stated that the terms "sex" and "gender" are conceptually distinct. Describing a person's sex is also describing the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish men from women. By contrast, when we talk about gender, we mean the unique set of characteristics a person has because of their sexual orientation. As Bleidorn et al. (2016) stated, "sex makes us man or woman; gender groups us as masculine or feminine." Once you are born, you have gender, but you do not have gender until you learn about social norms. People are viewed as "born sexed" but not "gendered," and they must be trained how to be (or do) masculine or feminine to be considered sex. Wood and Eagly (2015) described gender identity as the degree to which one defines a man or a woman. Psychological factors play a significant role in one's sense of self-identification as a particular gender. Gender roles vary from

culture to culture and civilization, and society teaches us what being masculine or feminine is.

Feminine and masculine roles are defined by society and culture according to the gender role hypothesis, which argues that gender is a social construct rather than an individual one. When individuals engage or communicate in their social roles at home, community, or workplace, they learn and become gendered. From this angle (Lindsey et al., 2011), *gender roles* are therefore defined as the anticipated attitudes and behaviors associated with each sex. Based on the existing norms, customs, and cultures of society, certain positions have been developed.

Traditionally, male duties have been linked with power, aggressiveness, and domination in many cultures, whereas the conventional image of feminine gender expectations has been connected with submission and obedience (Little, 2014). Traditionally, a woman's responsibility has been to provide for her family. These studies have suggested that she is better off working part-time at home than going back to work full-time. Men are often seen as providing for the family financially and making important choices for the family as a whole. Hence, the belief that manual jobs that require physical strength are more suitable to males, and this notion is reflected in females by either shying away or at least not encouraged by their families or society to pursue vocational education as it requires manual work, such as working in engineering workshops (Little, 2014).

A wide range of perspectives on gender expectations and their evolution may be found in various academic fields. Gender roles emerge due to interactions between people and their physical and socio-economic surroundings. They serve as cues to people as to what kinds of behaviors are suitable for which sex in society. For example, a girl can play with baby dolls and model herself after her mother. However, neither gender is better from an evolutionary or biological standpoint. According to this theory, gender differences are caused by hormones, not by learning. According to a feminist view on gender roles, women and men have varying societal influences. Several factors contribute to gender inequalities, such as males being expected to be the major breadwinners in their families. In this way, feminists advocate for the empowerment of

women at the micro and macro levels of society and politics. According to Little (2014), social values, ideas, and attitudes require that individuals learn how to act per gender roles via socialization. Children are taught from an early age that males and females are expected to behave in distinct ways. For example, males are often given greater freedom and responsibility than girls. Fathers forbid their sons from engaging in traditionally feminine activities, such as housecleaning and cooking. Household activities that require physical strength and tenacity may be assigned to them, such as bringing out the trash.

In contrast, daughters are supposed to be kind, loving, and typically modest, and they are taught to carry out most household chores. Through childhood and even into adulthood, they continue to carry these societal expectations about feminine and masculine roles as part of who they are as adults. Little (2014) stated that gender socialization occurs in four critical spheres: families, schools, friends and coworkers, and the media. Setting and enforcing norms for gender-specific behavior are the responsibility of every agent.

Gender has no one-size-fits-all definition. In most cases, a person's anatomical and physiological traits at birth are assigned to a sex category. However, gender may be accepted as socially constructed. Gender, however, cannot be equated with the distinctions in biology and physiology between males and females. Socially created statuses are the foundations of gender. A variety of biological and physiological differences between men and women, such as sex, skin color, stage of development, size, hormones, and genes, can be intrinsically transformed by social practices in the construction of social status through agreed-upon methods of instruction, emulation, learning, and enforcement (Little, 2014).

Gender roles may be re-learned, particularly with the rise of quick education, improved modernization, and urbanism. According to research on family life in the UAE by Schvaneveldt et al. (2005), rapid economic growth and modernization are starting to affect long-held attitudes about cultural values, gender, family leadership, and childcare practices in Middle Eastern culture.

Although gender equality and gender equity are sometimes used interchangeably, a fine line exists between the meanings of these two concepts. According to the United

Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2010), gender equality refers to the concept that both males and females, regardless of their age, should have equal and similar rights, resources, and protections. Hence, gender equality does not mean treating them in a similar way. Gender equity, however, is a common term used to enhance the meaning of not treating males and females similarly but fairly, as it is defined as "the process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls, and importantly the equality of outcomes and results… it refers to differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or differences between the sexes. Equity ensures that women and men and girls and boys have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when reaching the finishing line. It is about the fair and just treatment of both sexes that takes into account the different needs of the men and women, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group" (UNICEF, 2017, p. 3).

When discussing gender equality, a manifold array of terminologies has been used regarding gender equality and gender equity. In the next sections, the researcher will present some of the common terms that are mostly associated with this theoretical framework. These terms include empowerment, discrimination, gender action plan (GAP), gender balance, gender-based constraints, gender-based violence, gender accommodation, gender blindness, and so on (UNICEF, 2017).

Gender equality "concerns women and men, and it involves working with men and boys, women and girls to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviors, roles, and responsibilities at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Genuine equality means more than parity in numbers or laws on the books; it means expanding freedoms and improving the overall quality of life so that equality is achieved without sacrificing gains for males or females." Correspondingly, both genders are supposed to work hand-in-hand and cooperate, rather than compete, with each other to ensure that equal opportunities are given to all. This concept is not about how many of them are educated, working, or nominated in a given field, but instead about their enriched experiences (Clinton, 2012, p. 3). Other terms that are commonly used and are associated with gender equity are "women empowerment," which refers to the degree to which women and girls act freely, exercise their powers, and achieve their full potential, and "gender

integration," which refers to identifying gender inequalities during the project design phases and addressing them along the way (Clinton, 2012).

To elaborate on this initial definition, recognizing that empowerment cannot be given to people is imperative, as it is a process that involves the collective to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and bring about change. Women empowerment can be considered as consisting of interrelated mechanisms that entail awareness building about women's situations of inequality. Thus, women knowing their rights stem from a group identity and allow them to develop the capacities and skills needed for organizing and decision making. This starts from home to enable more participation in decision making. All these factors must be backed by action to create more equality and equity between men and women. Power to women means having control of their lives, having a voice that is listened to, the ability to create from a women's viewpoint, having the ability to make decisions and choices that influence society, and being respected as equal human beings and citizens. It is described by practitioners as a "psychological process" to change, which entails awareness of the power that exists, whether in individuals or groups. This notion not only emphasizes the unity and harmony of this concept within the community but also shows that power is not only granted to the "have nots," as it should also be exercised and taken by women themselves rather than being merely the recipients of power given to them by others (Sahay, 1998).

Mandal (2013) summarized the discussions of different authors by stating the five parts required to give women full empowerment. These parts are social, educational, economic, political, and psychological empowerment. Social refers to strengthening her position in the social structure, educational to improve their intellectual prospects, economic to have their economic independence, political to increase their participation in governance structures, and psychological to grow their self-worth by taking control of their lives.

Notably, gender equality and equity calls have emerged first as a defense and a reaction to women being underprivileged and underrepresented in societies. Furthermore, the common belief that women in traditional societies are exposed to

inequality must be clarified. If we have an extensive discussion of both Western and traditional societies and their histories, we can conclude that these inequalities have different timelines and contexts.

Traditional societies such as the UAE, derive their values and principles from their religion, which is Islam. Here, we have to distinguish between certain traditions and cultural practices that are not consistent with the true teachings of Islam, as well as the distorted interpretations of Islamic standards and values—spread mainly by Islamophobic groups—and the real meaning of these principles and values. Undeniably, these misconceptions are originally based on some wrong assumptions related to the story of Adam and Eve in Islam.

The misconception that women and men are not equal in Islam has been debunked by numerous early Mufasereen (interpreters of the Holy Quran, such as Ibn Katheer, Al Qurtibi, Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani, etc.) of the Holy Quran as well as modern writers who have offered alternative and contextual readings (Hassan, 2011).

Gender equity or equality is often measured in terms of educational attainment. Gender equity or equality in education implies that both men and women have equal access, participation, and success in education (Razavi, 2012). In this case, the ratio of women to men may be expressed as a number, with a value of 1 indicating perfect parity. However, using metrics, such as participation and access, to measure educational equality development has limits. Access and participation indicators, for example, are not always the outcomes of educational processes; it may be claimed. This implies that indicators, such as skilled employment after graduation, are not dynamic and do not go beyond the school timeframe. These methods do not capture the interaction between men and women, which may reveal minor inequities. Gender equity or equality cannot be measured simply by participation and inclusion in school. According to a study, how men and women interact socially and how their performance results vary in different societies must be considered (Kumar & Quisumbing, 2015). An approach that incorporates all these variables may show whether attempts to guarantee gender equality in education are being made and whether they are being effective.

One of the most notable initiatives made by the World Education Forum that left a difference in the education world was implementing the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, which aims to achieve education for all (EFA). Through partnership with countries and with the support of international agencies, many gender-related strategies were set into action, such as eliminating gender disparities and making sure that girls have equal access to a high quality of education, implementing strategies to change and address gender discrimination attitudes, raising gender awareness and removing gender bias, and having a thorough look into teachers' behaviors, curriculum, and textbooks, as well as student interactions (UNESCO, 2000).

Education is articulated in the 2030 agenda by the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which states that education is a main pillar in achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. This goal has three underlying principles: education is a fundamental human right and an enabling right, education is a public good, and gender equity or equality is inextricably linked to the right to EFA. By 2030, SDG4 planned targets include securing free, equitable access and completion of high-quality education, providing early childhood care to prepare children for primary education, providing equal access to vocational, technical, and tertiary education to all women and men, and providing young women and men with technical and vocational skills to secure employment for disadvantaged individuals, such as people with special needs and underrepresented groups, as well as other gender equality-related targets (UNESCO, 2016).

2.2.1 Gender Equality in Vocational Training

Gender equality is related to males and females being treated equally regarding living quality, education, and work possibilities without denying their rights by gender roles, stereotypes, or discrimination. Gender equity is a more flexible phrase than gender equality, and many academics prefer it because it does not require treating men and women equally, but rather fairly. Gender equity refers to equal access to education and equitable treatment of males and females in the educational process to close the gender gap. Over the last two decades, this word has developed from an emphasis on gender equity to a focus on roles and gender identity (Klein et al., 2007). It is preferred to

“women’s equity,” “women’s equality,” or “women’s advancement,” because the broad definition of gender equity includes benefits for both men and women, avoiding the kind of ambiguity that phrases, such as “manpower,” may imply (Klein et al., 2007).

Despite the global importance of gender equality and the numerous rules to eliminate inequality, Chandra (2011) claimed that unfair practices remain in practically all domains, particularly in skill development. In India, for example, women aged 25 to 54 years comprise only 30% of the workforce in 2010, which is far lower than the average female representation in other affluent countries. The Global Gender Gap Index rates countries based on the gender gap, which refers to differences in health, education, economy, and politics between men and women. This disparity may be seen in the fact that, although accounting for half of the world’s working population in 2015, women only created 37% of the GDP (Shashi & Puja, 2019). Gender equality is vital for a country’s economic and social development, since it eventually improves overall working conditions and output rates.

Despite numerous initiatives and policies aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls to fully participate in education and the labor market, data from UNESCO on gender equality in education show that women continue to face gender biases. This factor influences their ability to access technical and vocational education and training (UNESCO, 2016). This continued discrimination, which limits women’s work opportunities, affects society as a whole. According to the International Labour Organization (2015), women continue to suffer from high unemployment rates worldwide. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (United Nations, 2015) includes a call to ensure fair employment access to women and to encourage women to participate in areas, such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and vocational and technical training.

The UAE’s efforts to promote gender equality have shown varied outcomes, which will have an impact on the future. The UAE is known for equal access and achievement in women’s education, and this trend is not new. For female educational accomplishment, the UAE is known as “the land of the future.” Despite many years of strong educational success, however, women do not have an equal share of paid work.

Three elements determine whether women's proportion in paid employment will rise in the future. These factors include academic options that boost career prospects, public and private sector employment, and job retention (Kemp, 2013).

2.3 Importance of Vocational Training

Billett (2011) indicated that vocational education is a broad field of education, which comprises both post-schooling elements referred to as vocational education, which has its own institutions and policies, and some higher education occupations. This broad definition includes the fields of medicine, law, commerce, tourism, and cooking. Despite this fact, public discourses mostly refer to the aforementioned narrow field, that is, post-school vocational education designed mainly for those who were not able to participate in higher education. Accordingly, commonalities exist between the vocational education field (broad meaning) and sector (narrow meaning), as they all aim to develop and sustain the capabilities and competencies required for working life. Likewise, Karmel (2011) highlighted this problematic and naïve attempt to define vocational education and indicated that referring to it as designed for specific occupations is "as clear as a mud." He proposed an alternative solution, which is to distinguish between higher education and vocational education and training on the basis of their providers. On the one hand, universities and colleges, and on the other hand, VET institutions. In this section, the researcher will concentrate on the definitions and meanings of the vocational education and training sector.

Notably, vocations and occupations must be distinguished, as this distinction may clarify the underlying challenges in implementing vocational education and training and the confusion that some learners struggle with when choosing their specializations. The meaning that is usually attributed to the word "vocation" is that it refers to paid employment and the personal calling that individuals engage in. However, occupations arise from societal needs, whereas vocations are a result of personal needs and desires (Billett, 2011). Boyatzis (1991) stressed the importance of having an intersection and balance between an individual's vocation and occupation goals, and he discussed this point from a different perspective. He developed a theory of action and effective job performance (Figure 1) that shows that maximum performance can be attained when

individuals' innate abilities and attributes overlap with job demands and the organization's environment, creating what he called the "best fit."

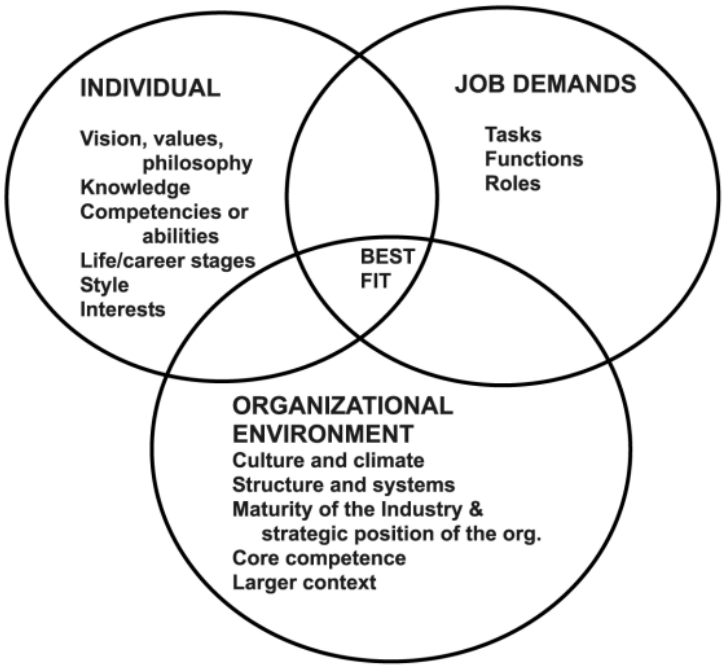

Figure 1: Theory of Action and Job Performance

Clements (1977) pointed out that "vocation" and "career" are often used interchangeably, as they are both about work. On the one hand, career education is broader in its coverage of occupations to achieve the goal of providing sufficient information and experiences for career decision making. Vocation, on the other hand, aims to provide skills, training, knowledge, and social interaction competencies to prepare individuals for entry into paid employment in specific job or job clusters. In his comparison of standard career education and vocational education, he clarified that vocational education is purposed for students who want to gain skills for a specific job, which normally begins after the 10th grade, and the curriculum is focused on one core or trade area. Simultaneously, career education is meant for all students, from early childhood until adulthood, and extends to several concepts and fields.

In the early twentieth century, many educators and schools were concerned about the labor force's needs, as it shifted from a primarily agriculture-based economy to an industrial economy (Hyslop-Margison, 1999). The need for vocational training arose to

satisfy the demands of an ever-growing and changing economy, covering the needs of the labor market for the most educated and skilled persons to adapt to changes and decline unemployment (Froomkin, 1980). Likewise, vocational education and training help solve the issues of a growing economy by reducing youth unemployment and accelerating economic growth (Psacharopoulos, 1997).

Vocational training is the best way to assist non-academic students in securing employment after school completion (Hyslop-Margison, 1999). Given that vocational training is based on key trade, Kane and Frazee (1978) indicated that the single most important factor in selecting a nontraditional program, such as vocational training, is interest in the field. Students' experiences in vocational education can positively affect the nation's workforce (Silverberg et al., 2004). Vocational training in the tourism and hospitality industry is important because the nature of this sector requires a high quality of human resources (Chang & Hsu, 2010). In addition, Billett (2011) synthesized the key focus of some of the common vocational education definitions as "preparing and equipping learners for working life" (p. 26). Many countries are concerned about the skills that students will acquire at the end of their vocational training term and how they will be developed or utilized (Grubb, 2006).

Vocational education is often considered to have low status, rising from the historically and culturally rooted misconceptions for a long time, which is mainly related to the low regard to manual and handy jobs and to the low wages and rewards of these particular occupations. To clarify this point, Billett (2011) compared vocational occupations to professions, such as medicine; for example, physicians receive high salaries, and to study medicine or any highly regarded profession, the admission criteria are tough, and only a few from a large number of applicants are accepted. In contrast, vocational occupations often have low-level certificates. Billett (2011) magnified this dilemma by stating, "for instance, in one country, the acronym for institute of technical education is disparagingly referred to as 'it is the end', i.e., ITE" (Institute of Technical Education) (p. 37). In addition, vocational education training had a low status in some nations and, as a result, was subjected to racism and student minorities. Most of those enrolling in vocational training are low-income students, which makes it a second-class education system (Grubb, 2006).

Three vocational systems have been established: the school-based, the dual apprenticeship, and the informal-based VET systems (Eichhorst et al., 2013). The school-based system is characterized by the duality between general education and vocational training. The students in this system have two options: the general stream, which equips them with academic knowledge that qualifies them for higher education, and the VET stream, which equips them with vocational training that satisfies the needs of current occupations. Both options are integrated into the compulsory school system with a level of variation. Some countries provide specific knowledge and skills tailored to specific occupations. This system is implemented in some countries to provide opportunities for students who are weak in academic education or cannot invest in higher education due to financial situations.

In a dual apprenticeship system, learners acquire general and transferrable skills. It counteracts the issue faced by school-based training systems of educational mismatch when a learner begins a new job. This system is suitable for practically oriented young learners, as it increases their motivation engagement and guarantees quick entry into the labor market. In some developing countries, an informal VET system is the main training method with formal general and vocational schooling. Informal apprenticeship is open to anyone who would like to join, unlike “traditional apprenticeship,” which is restricted to families that transfer their knowledge from one generation to another. Apprentices learn in a work-based environment and sometimes pay for their training. Informal apprenticeship is a common form of vocational training and is better than the formal system’s outdated training (Eichhorst et al., 2013).

The apprenticeship system outside of the formal vocational general schooling system is referred to as traditional or informal-based vocational system. India and many other African nations with a long history of informal labor have a higher prevalence of this model. Despite the fact that it is informal, there are some structures based on contracts and agreements to regulate its process. It is mainly an informal training that takes place at work and a fee could be paid to the trainer (Eichhorst et al., 2013).

Vocational training provides learners with the technical skills and knowledge to perform tasks independently, regardless of their age. Vocational training may also

include general education elements, which provide additional knowledge and skills that contribute to professionalism, since the main objective of vocational training is designing a set of activities that aims to transfer theoretical knowledge into professional skills required for specific jobs (Mortaki, 2012). Based on the supply and demand of the country's economic structure, educational policies guide vocational training institutes in offering programs needed to develop learners' professional skills (Efstratoglou & Nikolopoulou, 2011).

Some fundamental goals of VET are developing the professional and technical skills of grade 12 graduates as necessary for vocational jobs. It also satisfies the constantly changing labor market needs, improves the professional skills required for expertise, and helps learners adjust to their jobs' changing vocational and social skills (Zarifis, 2003).

In several developed and developing countries with high unemployment rates among the younger population, vocational training often provides more jobs for the youth. High youth unemployment occurred mainly after the great recession of 2008, when many young people stopped investing in tertiary education and lost hope in education. In 2011, the rates of youth who were neither employed nor enrolled in education reached 4% in the Netherlands and Latin America, 12% in Australia and New Zealand, 15% in the United States, 20% in Italy and Greece, and 25% in Africa (OECD (2012). Vocational training provides the youth with the opportunities and skillsets needed to continue higher education or enter the job market, which increases their odds of embarking on suitable career paths (Middleton, 1993; Quintini & Martin, 2006).

Universally, people must obtain the skills required to advance technical and economic progress. However, this case has not been observed in practice. For example, Nigeria reported a 37:1 ratio of secondary schools to technical schools. TVET encompasses a broad array of technological and related skills and an understanding of the knowledge and attitudes regarding these fields of expertise. It should be incorporated as an essential component of education in schools to improve the resources available within industries that rely on vocational skills, namely, applied medical sciences, technology, and commerce (Oviawe et al., 2017). Vocational training is advantageous

for the promotion of economies and the reduction of poverty ((Mutarubukwa & Mazan, 2017).

2.4 History of Vocational Education in the World

Vocational education started when people began to learn to use tools to provide a living for themselves. The concept of vocations became clear when the ancient Greek empire separated the social classes into two classes: the thinkers and philosophers and the workers. Although this conception can be held before, starting from Plato's era, this latter class is believed to have fixed and restricted abilities, whereas the former class is the only one able to innovate and create (Billett, 2011). In this section, the researcher attempts to provide a chronological recount of how vocational education and training came into the form that we perceive now.

Cooley (1915), through his visits to some European vocational schools (i.e., Ireland, England, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Germany) from 1913 to 1914, documented his observations with special attention to agricultural schools. He pointed out that vocational schools must focus on students' interests and development instead of adhering to industry demands. This point was the beginning of the emergence of the "whole boy" term. He also studied the problem of control and supervision in Germany and in other countries he visited. Finally, he addressed the early attempts and unique experiences in those countries regarding vocational training that was based on the needs of the state country.

The term "whole boy" was then also emphasized by House (1921). He indicated two kinds of thinkers: those who are concerned with the child and the job (individualistic and focus on fitting the child to the job) and those who are concerned with the child and the social process. The former had a narrow view of vocational education, whereas the latter had a social view. John Dewey is one of the thinkers who adopted the social view of vocational education. He stated that a child's experience is the basis for any learning and knowledge gain. From this point of view, he believed that the social context of the learning organization of any curriculum or content, in what he calls a "progressive" instead of traditional education, is mandatory to gain the ability to apply the knowledge in any related situation in everyday life (Dewey et al., 1939).

According to Dewey's (1938) experiential theory or "continuum" (p. 17), the child's experience is the basis of any learning and knowledge gain, and therefore, he believed that a social context of the learning organization of any curriculum or content must be established in what he calls a "progressive" instead of traditional education. Based on the learners' readiness and accompanied by the quality and authenticity of these experiences as the essential component of the theory, the learner will then be able to apply his knowledge in any related situation (Roberts, 2003).

Perhaps one of the most famous arguments with regards to where and how vocational training should take place is the one between John Dewey and David Snedden, which has marked the history of vocational training development. This argument led to two distinct vocational education models in the early twentieth century: Snedden advocated education for social efficiency, and Dewey advocated education for democracy. The first approach draws a clear distinction between liberal education and vocational education. Snedden saw vocational education divided in the form of professional education (lawyers, physicians, engineers, etc.), commercial education (bookkeepers, clerks, etc.), industrial education (bricklayers, machinists, etc.), agricultural education, and finally the household arts (dressmaking, cooking, etc.). He believed that those who could not engage in a more intellectually demanding education must be trained to fit the job and accept their current situation (DeFalco, 1992).

Apparently, this was exactly the opposite of what Dewey advocated in his vocational education views and therefore opposed Snedden's approach. He believed that a choice must not be made between vocational and cultural education and that children must not be educated for the sole purpose of serving the market's earnings. To Dewey, vocational education must appreciate learners' freedom and initiatives more than automatic skills and memorizing lessons and instead called for the need for "industrial intelligence" (DeFalco, 1992).

In 1917, the president approved a policy regarding vocational education in the United States under the name Smith-Hughes Act. It raised awareness about vocational education and offered practical training for unemployed youth in needed areas, such as

agriculture, industry, and commerce. This awareness came after the Great War because of a shortage of trained men and women and training facilities (Board, 1917).

According to Corazzini's (1966) study conducted in Worcester and Massachusetts vocational schools, vocational training graduates follow the same career path as high school graduates in the workplace most of the time. The position of the regular high school graduate was not markedly better than the position of vocational graduate in local firms.

In the northeastern United States, a skill center in the greater Muskegon area had a vocational-occupational education and training program to provide the youth with the skills needed to help those who could not go to school due to health conditions transition into the labor market (Austin & Sommerfeld, 1967).

Divita (1968) conducted a cross-sectional study to evaluate the efficiency of current vocational training programs in preparing the youth for work. By distributing a questionnaire to secondary school administrators and board members, he indicated that funds have not been sufficiently allocated to these programs and that secondary schools must expand their curriculum to encompass more vocational studies.

Regarding employers' perspectives, Talarzyk (1975) investigated their attitudes toward vocational education. A questionnaire was sent to the personnel departments of 1,000 firms randomly selected from the "Directory of Ohio Manufacturers." He found that 60% of employers' experience with vocational training graduates was favorable, 76% of them believed that more practical training should be provided to these graduates, 13% thought that they were poorly trained, and 73% did not have enough knowledge about vocational training in the state and would like to know more.

Kaufman and Lewis (1968) conducted an in-depth interview to improve vocational training programs in three cities in Pennsylvania. Using experts' reports and information gathered from interviews with graduates from colleges, universities, and vocational training programs, they found that graduates entering the workplace without being trained in specialized occupations and vocational training in smaller cities were more adaptable to the local market. They recommended developing programs in general skills, applications, and opportunities for job exploration as part of the curriculum and

guidance for students in these programs. Morrison (1979) showed that the highest priority is allocated in initiating more collaboration with key segments in the employment community.

Some amendments were made to the Vocational Education Act in 1968, including giving more attention to special needs learners and developing vocational education to be implemented starting from elementary school (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976).

The conversation related to the rapid technological pace and its effect on current and future jobs started in the 1970s, according to Little (1970). In his review of studies related to graduates of vocational-technical, which covered the mid-1960s, he stated that the old occupations disappeared, and new occupations emerged, not always in foreseeable fashion. This study revealed that most graduates (63%) found employment mostly in training-related occupations and in their home communities. The graduates mainly found employment in a year or less, where salaries were normal.

Hoffman and Hoffman (1976) discussed the factors influencing vocational education development. These factors were the Industrial Revolution and education movement, the American Civil War, foreign educational influence, the formation of industrial arts organizations, and different economic upheavals and sociological shifts. These factors all contributed to the formation of industrial arts societies.

Vocational education and training were modified by new vocational policies and the rise of new economic times. As a result, many classic vocational education and training policies and procedures had significant organizational and purpose changes. These shifts are frequently cited as a response to the changing nature of labor brought on by new technology and globalization's impact on national economies (Chappell, 2003).

When considering work, people typically distinguish between work that depends heavily on intellectual effort, that is, working with their heads, and work that depends heavily on practical skills, that is, working with their hands. Another distinction is between "white-collar" jobs, which refer to professionals and office workers, and "blue-collar" jobs, which require technical and manual labor. However, these "black" and "white" distinctions have undergone major changes, making it tricky to apply them in the information age. Nevertheless, TVET must be differentiated from other fields in

terms of its development. In the late 20th century, TVET must be utilized in the transition from the Industrial Age to the Information Age to equip workers with the tools that enable them to meet the challenges of the emerging work economy (UNESCO, 2001).

In UNESCO's revised recommendation, technical and vocational education applies to all forms and aspects of education, including technical and vocational education offered in general education by the public or private sectors, whether formal or informal, to ensure that all community members have access to lifelong learning pathways. Therefore, technical and vocational education is an integral part of general education and prepares for occupational fields. In the same way, it is an aspect of lifelong learning and a method of facilitating poverty alleviation. The general principles, goals, and guidelines of technical and vocational education are applied by each country according to its socio-economic needs and available resources in a changing world to enhance the overall status of technical and vocational education. The application of the provisions and the timing of the implementation depend upon the special conditions and constitutional provisions existing in each country.

Technical and vocational education must be a vital aspect of the educational process in all countries and must contribute to achieving the societal goals of greater democratization and social, cultural, and economic development. At the same time, it should assist in developing the potential of all individuals, both men and women, to actively participate in establishing and implementing these goals, regardless of religion, race, and age. It should also contribute to people's understanding of contemporary civilization's scientific and technological aspects while also considering the social, political, and environmental implications of scientific and technological change.

Technical and vocational education empowers people to contribute to society through their occupations and other areas of their lives. An important aspect emphasized in TVET is abolishing the barriers between levels and areas of education. Between education and the world of work and between school and society, the appropriate integration of technical, vocational, and general education is at all levels. Technical and vocational education contribute to creating an open and flexible educational structure

that considers individuals' educational needs and the evolution of occupations and jobs that recognize work experience as a part of learning. Moreover, it should have a broad base that facilitates horizontal and vertical articulation within the education system and between schools and the world of work, thus eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO, 2001).

2.5 Factors Affecting Enrollment and Completion in Vocational Training Institutes

Given the demand for vocational training schools and their numerous benefits, investigating several issues and obstacles that learners face, which are sometimes out of their control, is essential. Students' engagements in vocational education are associated with two dimensions: students' enrollment choice as a starting point and their completion of their vocational studies.

Using questionnaires on 633 students in five randomly selected schools in southwest Ohio, Rossetti (1991) conducted a study to identify why high school students decide not to enroll in vocational courses. The findings revealed that students from higher socioeconomic classes hold negative images of vocational education; some have a negative image of vocational education in their communities; some are uninterested in the offered courses; half of them have a neutral attitude toward vocational education; and some have their course choices influenced by their mothers, friends, siblings, and teachers. According to his study, images of vocational education are affected by what applicants hear and see, and based on students' interviews, most of what they hear and see is negative.

Non-completion of vocational training, according to McInnis et al. (2000), remains a considerable concern. Notably, non-completion does not imply failure; rather, it can be attributed to various factors, such as the attainment of goals, the acquisition of desired skills, or even the student's employment before completing the vocational center course. He identified various factors that contribute to the non-completion of one's education and affect career choices, university, or courses in the Australian context. These factors were related to the students' experiences regarding their coping with course demands, academic and social integration, and the quality of teaching. Personal factors also have a significant influence, such as financial aspects, part-time

employment, competing commitments, age, external enrollment, departure time from work, and the desired goal. Attributing non-completion in vocational education and training to a single factor is irrational. These factors, according to McInnis et al. (2000), are problems in employment, courses, health, chance events, institutional factors, financial problems, and familial and other commitments. The wrong choice of the field of study, financial difficulty, and dissatisfaction with the student experience are the other considered factors (Yorke, 1997).

Factors associated with the non-completion of vocational training are difficult to determine (McInnis et al., 2000), since identifying the factors of a multifaceted issue is not easy. In addition, Morrison (1979) remarked that due to a lack of structured national statistics for vocational training programs, this concern can only be slightly analyzed or examined. Student dissatisfaction with the vocational center, quality of teaching and learning, and a mismatch between student capacity and center demands generally contribute to non-completions or early withdrawals (McInnis et al., 2000).

Lewis and Cheng (2006) investigated whether changes in how students are assigned to curriculum tracks accompany the current movement in curriculum thinking. They also investigated whether racial and socioeconomic characteristics continue to influence tracking and determined whether kids receive vocational education, as well as if these same demographic factors influence principals' assumptions about graduates' likely post-school destinations. They found that race and socioeconomic position considerably affect track assignment and main expectations, following the principle of self-fulfilling prophecy. Although no significant difference was observed between white students and ethnic and racial minorities in enrollment in the vocational track, a difference occurred in enrollment in the general track.

Gender, familial background, and specific places within the working class contribute to effective learning; however, they are not sufficient. Vocational habitus strengthens and develops them following job demands, yet it may also repeat social disparities. Building a sense of how to be, the necessary feelings and morality, and the ability for emotional labor are all part of developing a vocational habitus, as Colley et al. (2003) discussed.

Using a nationally representative dataset from China, Wang and Guo (2019) found that, compared with academic institutions, participants in upper-secondary technical and vocational education come from significantly disadvantaged families, notably in terms of parental education levels. They also discovered that females are likely to attend specialized secondary schools—the most selective technical and vocational education schools.

The greatest disparity in education is observed in the urban–rural divide. In this regard, the role of urban bias must be understood, which is often visible in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Hartl, 2009). When compared to the options accessible to urban children, rural youth are poorly served by public and private education and training providers. In most low income developing nations, there is a significant degree of "urban bias" in the delivery of publicly sponsored education and training programs (Bennell, 2007).

Esters and Bowen (2004) studied former students of an urban agricultural education program to identify the prominent factors influencing their decision to choose this path. The study results indicated that parents or guardians were the main influencers, with the females having more influence than the males. Various circumstances and experiences influence their decisions, half of which are related to recruitment activities, interest in animals, and agricultural career aspirations.

Reis and Kahler (1997) studied five and a half Iowa secondary agricultural programs comprising 1,429 students. The most prominent factors influencing students' enrollment decisions are human influence, parents, the agricultural instructor, friends, and former agricultural education students. Personal and organizational factors include personal interests, farm background, and agricultural course participation.

Hosch (2008) used regression analysis with the Consortium for the Study Retention Data Exchange to uncover associations among institutional features, such as selectivity, size, housing, diversity, and first-time students' retention and graduation rates ($R^2 = 0.764$). Admission rates, the proportion of students living on campus, and first-semester grade point averages are the most important criteria. Even though high

school rank is substantially associated, it is omitted from the regression models due to collinearity with entrance score.

The field of vocational training has undergone many advancements and changes over the years, which has piqued the interest of academics in performing studies specializing in evaluating its consequences. Another recurring topic, which continues to this day, is to explore students' views and teachers' opinions, discuss challenges and impediments, elucidate the condition of minorities and women, and evaluate experiments integrating academic and vocational studies.

2.6 Vocational Training and Skills Mismatch

Individuals must begin to develop appropriate abilities as early childhood and primary school assets to prepare them for a dynamic global economy. The mismatch of skills that leads to structural unemployment is one of the symptoms of the global economic crisis, which is why it has become a major focus for policymakers. Skill mismatch refers to workers having lower or higher skills than the job tasks needed. Although employees can develop their skills over time, a mismatch in skills and qualifications can permanently harm workers' careers, as it can cause them to be terminated or to frequently change jobs (Klosters, 2014).

In contrast, unused skills due to unemployment will eventually fade away, resulting in a waste of early investments and present resources. Unemployment caused by structural factors and skill mismatches requires immediate and long-term planning and collaboration between the government and the public and commercial sectors. Creating new employment is not sufficient, and the quality of these positions and the skillsets required to do so must be extensively examined.

If this principle is overlooked, generating additional positions without a strategy to improve work skillsets will have long-term detrimental implications. This means that creating new employment and identifying new skillsets for the labor market must be done simultaneously. To increase their skill match, employees must also embrace a "learn first" approach rather than a "work first" mentality. This factor is where vocational training enters, since it can assist unemployed young people by providing

training in skills in demand in the labor market and offering appropriate training to individuals who are currently employed. Furthermore, closing the gap between the school system and the job market requires a solid career advice system, ongoing workplace involvement, and personalized training programs (Klosters, 2014).

Education in general and engineering and science in particular produce people with the skills needed to engage in higher value-added work in the new niches that require pattern recognition, synthesizing, and complex problem solving. Equal educational opportunities help stabilize wages, whereas what graduates want is to be in demand and make a decent wage. According to Friedman (2005), a high percentage of university graduates will not find a job in the future, and in many cases, graduates with social science and humanities degrees will face the prospect of unemployment.

The quality of education students receive today is arguably not focused and even poor. The education system fails to fill the gap in some major occupations because students generally aim to obtain a higher education degree and education in the humanities (Friedman, 2005). Therefore, the number of unemployed youths must be minimized by exposing them to experiences and opportunities in many different fields to choose a promising career path. This dilemma is global, and hence applies to the MENA region.

This skill mismatch stems from technicians' higher demands than white-collar workers seeking government jobs and similar positions. At the same time, the distinctions between technical and academic education must be abolished because they are not universally recognized. Most arts and social science graduates, for example, are unable to execute technological tasks and, in most circumstances, have no other option except to work in an office. This comment is not meant to diminish the value of a liberal arts degree, but these graduates must ensure that they can find work that pays well (Gray & Herr, 1998).

Several studies on Career and Technical Education (CTE) graduates' employability were conducted. In Jordan, Al-Alawneh and Alhawasin (2013) investigated the perceptions of educators and employers about CTE graduates' employability. The results supported Jordon's National Strategic Plan of Education 2006

regarding the relationship between education and work. The plan suggests that education responds to labor market needs and economic development. Furthermore, the study aligned with that of Brennan et al. (1996), which was conducted on British and German graduates. They indicated that the gap is increasing between the supply and the demand for certain skilled graduates equipped with employability skills that they can utilize in any kind of job.

According to the European Training Foundation (1999), employers in Jordan complain that the MoE does not prepare school and university graduates to work life and that they are not interested in training them for the labor market, including the vocational stream, as it is mainly theoretical and not practical as claimed. Some argue that the reason behind this issue is that the vocational skills demanded by the labor market are far more sophisticated than what is being offered in a two-year vocational diploma. Employers are also concerned that the vocational programs offered are outdated and of low quality.

On the one hand, according to Gray (1996), the economy and labor market will not demand university bachelor's degree holders in the future because countries will need workers with technical skills and qualifications, not holders of certificates that are useless in the workplace. On the other hand, Gray believed that a new form of vocational education, such as tech prep, must be implemented in high schools. However, one significant challenge is that parents are unsure whether vocational training education can provide a secure future for their children because it is associated with a lower status than university education, an attitude related to their underestimation of the quality of these institutes.

The MENA area employed only 62% of its potential human capital, significantly below the global average of 65%, according to the World Economic Forum's Human Capital Index. The MENA area is defined as boosting women's involvement in the workplace, even though it is still relatively low, decreasing public sector employment, and reducing reliance on foreign workers. Despite future intentions to generate employment, the region's young university graduates are unemployed at a rate of 31%. The countries with the largest availability of indigenous capabilities include Egypt,

Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. According to LinkedIn data, commercial bankers, financial specialists, accountants, teachers, engineers, quality assurance professionals, and IT consultants are among the most prevalent highly skilled jobs in the MENA region (Leopold et al., 2017).

Kuwait has 41% of the positions likely to be automated, followed by Bahrain and Saudi Arabia with 46%, the UAE with 47%, Egypt with 49%, Morocco and Turkey with 50%, and Qatar with 52%. According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report, by 2020, 21% of the main skills necessary in the UAE and 41% in Turkey will be completely different from those required in 2015. As a result, considerable improvements in the educational system, in general, and in the vocational training sector are required (Leopold et al., 2017).

2.7 History of Education in the UAE

As stated in Article 17 of the UAE Constitution, "Education is a fundamental factor for the progress of the society. Education is mandatory in its primary stage and is free of charge at all stages in the UAE. The law lays down the necessary plans for disseminating and spreading everywhere all levels of education and for eradicating illiteracy" (UN Women, 2021). This reflects the UAE government's determination to make education a priority, providing it free for all its citizens.

The UAE country profile must be analyzed to understand the educational system of the UAE, with its geographical location and its political and financial contexts. In this section, the researcher will analyze the historical and current period of growth of the UAE education system and describe the framework of the education system of the UAE. The role of management institutions in fostering education will then be discussed along with the recent trends in education, which now aim at encouraging Abu Dhabi to become a global economic center. After this strategy, the position of educational leaders in Abu Dhabi public schools will be discussed, including a detailed overview by ADEK of the criteria for leadership recruiting, roles, preparation, and performance evaluations of educational teachers and directors.

2.7.1 History of the Development of the UAE System of Traditional and Modern Education

The UAE was established as a unified country in 1971, striving to become one of its strategic objectives as a key source of education for its people. Since the 1820s, the British Empire secured its trade road from Basra to India, viewing this region as an area with not much economic aspiration and that would not yield any investment. Despite this, locals in the Gulf region, with the help of some expatriates, especially Arabs, established many schools from the 1920s to the 1960s (Davidson, 2008). Education in the UAE focused primarily on religious or Islamic education, which was further a base of formal education. School education in the UAE mainly relies on Islamic standards, traditions, and national educational objectives without ignoring modern developments and fields of research in the region.

What represented the MoE of the United Arab States (Alnabah, 1996) earlier was gradually formed as follows:

1. The Mutawa and the Katateeb (Conventional systems of education)
2. The educational circles (Modern systems of education)
3. The New Education Structure.

Most Gulf countries' earliest form of education was called "Al Kutab" or "Al Katateeb." Children learn the Quran, basic reading and writing, and math by the Imam of the neighborhood in mosques or at home. It was also called religious instruction, where a group of children is taught to recite the Quran and sometimes learn basic writing and arithmetic skills in six Gulf monarchies: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. During that period, no structured classrooms were open. Therefore, it is based on personal awareness and knowledge learning through contact with others (Alhebsi et al., 2015).

From 1820 until the beginning of 1900, learning was one of the common forms of education in which Islamic training offered skill-based knowledge. Written or verbal contexts transmitted this way of teaching from generation to generation. The conventional association between students and teachers exists (Alnabah, 1996).

Mutawa was a religiously well-versed man who taught boys and girls the words of the prophet Mohammad (hadith), although many of his roles were social and moral teachings. Mutawa used to be quite friendly and provide guidance or evaluate disputes in his culture. He shared his community's weddings and social gatherings. He was highly respected by society for his moral values and fear of Allah, the Mighty Creator, and since he has a high degree of social integrity (Alnabah, 1996). He had many references to the Quran, which helped people learn how to write, read, and follow his religious standards. While Mutawa often taught at home, richer trading families (i.e., governing elites) organized Katateeb. The Katateeb is a position or school for the instruction of children and youth of the Holy Quran, Islamic education, learning, reading, and simple mathematics (Alhebsi et al., 2015). The Katateeb is similar to the modern school with its teachers and additional resources. Katateeb is usually found in well-established commercial coastal towns before the formation of the UAE (Alnabah, 1996). This kind of teaching was subsequently changed to formal pedagogical lessons.

The second stage is known as the education circles, which look like the traditional educator–student model. A teacher transfers knowledge in a lecturing style from one teacher to one group of students. Religious scholars often came from Saudi Arabia by invitation from Sheik or other rich patrons. They have extensive knowledge of Islam, languages, and other subjects responsible for education circles. Sometimes, students volunteer in different communities to teach people. These educational circles were in nearby mosques, the Sheik's residence, or the boss's house. Similar subjects, such as the Holy Quran, Sunnah (Islamic way of life), writing, reading, and mathematics, were usually instructed by the scholar. Studying was often more intense due to the exceptional knowledge of the scholar than the instructions given by the local Mutawa (Alhebsi et al., 2015).

At the beginning of the 19th century, traditional education changed, and a new semi-organized education appeared from 1907 to 1953, as a result of the Arab awakening era at that time calling for adhering to the Quran and Sunnah and consequently enhancing Arabic language teaching. One of the first schools that was established in 1907 was "A'Taimiah Almahmoudiah School" in Sharjah by Shaikh Ali Almahmoud after the First World War. This phase continued its efforts by developing more schools

and bringing educators and scholars from nearby countries to help in the development of these schools. In addition, the idea of developing better schools has evolved with social life and the booming pearling industry in the 19th century (Alhebsi et al., 2015).

In the early 20th century, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah founded the first structured schools in the Sheikdoms. These schools were ruled by Emirati nationals studying abroad and Arab expatriates, most noticeably from Egypt and Palestine (Khalifa & Ridge, 2013). In 1930, a restrictive maritime agreement with the UK led to the collapse of the pearling industry, which made maintaining these schools and paying for teachers harder. Therefore, these schools were closed (Davidson, 2008).

After the economic recession, a few schools reopened. Until 1953, formal West-style training was introduced (e.g., modern education). After that, additional Emirates schools were established with financing primarily from Kuwait (Davidson, 2008). However, teachers are also sponsored by Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to work. They also used the curriculums of their home countries most of the time. At the same time, several Emirate curricula were used. The Egyptian model played a dominant role in defining the early education structure of the UAE since many of the teachers were Egyptians. Education experts from Egypt have collaborated with the Emirate leaders. The teaching styles in the UAE began to reflect the old ones in Egypt and the wider Middle East. After establishing the Abu Dhabi Emirates in the early sixties, it developed and financed its education system, whereas the other UAE Emirates continued to rely on external assistance (Khalifa & Ridge, 2013).

After England left the Lower Gulf, and the UAE was formed in 1971, the local education system had new priorities. Given the country's reliance on foreign assistance and its associated difficulties, home-grown systems of trained schoolteachers have become important. Moreover, UAE citizens had to be quickly trained and able, due to the influx of skilled expatriates attracted by the oil boom, to hold public and private positions. Via the development of new and highly diversified industries, a better-educated workforce can help the government accomplish its twin objectives of nationalization and decrease its reliance on oil (Davidson, 2008). By 1972, efforts to standardize the curriculum were initialized by the newly established Minister for

Education. The MoE used the Kuwait educational curriculum from 1971 to 1977. In 1977, the MoE started to change its curriculum by establishing a standardized program for primary and middle schools. The primary objective was to produce curricula that reflected the identity and culture of the UAE as a company (UNESCO, 2011).

In 1980, ministerial decision no. 10 grouped technical education into three categories: industrial, commercial, and agricultural education (Ministry of Education, 1993). The objectives of the vocational and technical schools at that time were to equip individuals with Islamic cultural and general knowledge to assist their personal development and to prepare them for technical and vocational jobs to fulfill the country's economic needs. Correspondingly, it fosters an appreciation of the values inherent in manual and vocational work and raises the quality of graduates by providing them with current knowledge in their areas of specialization. At that time, vocational and technical training was offered to school students in the preparatory and secondary phases (Ajawi, 1999).

In 1983, the Education Ministers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region decided to adopt a unified program in mathematics and general science for the elementary and intermediate school stages (grades 1–9). By 1985, a single Emirati curriculum had been designed and launched; since then, education has been compulsory for all boys and girls of Emirati until the age of 12 years (Khalifa & Ridge, 2013).

In 1988, vocational training was offered at the Higher Colleges of Technology. With this development, international and Western collaborations began to appear. These colleges offered diplomas in technology, business, health sciences, education, engineering, and graphic arts to male and female students on separate campuses (Raven, 2011).

2.7.2 Structure of the UAE Education System

All aspects of UAE education were under the responsibility of the MoE, including schools, colleges, universities, and postgraduate programs. It remained prevailing until the privatization of education not only in the UAE but also on an international level (Verger et al., 2016). As a result, higher education is now provided by the MoE, in

addition to the private sector. The Department of Education and Knowledge handles the supervision, control, and direction of the development initiatives of the education sector of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, including public and private schools (UAE Government Portal, 2018).

As for Dubai, the Dubai Education Council (DEC) and KHDA are two key institutions that regulate the educational process in the emirate. The DEC strives to follow universal expectations based on international accreditation and comprehensive quality-control programs. Given that KHDA can audit schools in the Emirates, it is also accountable for private education development and efficiency in Dubai. The MoE regulates all educational establishments in the country, where education strategies and systems are devised. In the nine education zones, the Ministry provides information and policies, accordingly distributed by schools in the region in which they are responsible. It involves the determination of school session examination schedules for teachers and professionals related to the administration of educational institutions. The standards must be met at educational institutions, curricula, and qualifications criteria (UAE Government Portal, 2018).

Most local towns have two schools: primary and secondary. One for boys and the other for girls. Pre-primary education (kindergarten [KG]1–2), primary education (grades 1–5), preparatory education (grades 6–9), secondary education (grades 10–12), and higher schools were free for UAE citizens. Table 4 describes the different types of schools in the UAE (UNESCO, 2015).

KG houses children under first-grade entry (four to six years old), where children learn and develop various skills, such as social, language, physical, and academic skills. Mixed-gender education in KG has two levels: KG1 and KG2 (UAE Government Portal, 2018). Pre-school education is not compulsory, and private organizations in the UAE directly finance them, but the curriculum is set by the MoE. Pre-school personnel have been organized into several teacher structures, two deputy heads, and two heads. The subjects are Arabic, English, math, science, art, culture, and music (UAE Government Portal, 2018).

Pre-primary education aims to assist children by offering them good models according to the values of the Islamic faith and correct behavior rules consistent with their age. It also encourages children to search, discover, invent, and monitor their physical growth (UNESCO, 2011). It helps children learn about school life and develop the ability to read and write according to their age and needs. Pre-school education prepares children for their primary or secondary success (Cycle 1) and beyond (UAE Government Portal, 2018).

Table 4: Various Types of Educational Institutions in the UAE

Age of Pupils/ Purpose	School/ Stage
4–6 Years of age	Pre-School
6–12 years of age	Primary School (Cycle 1)
13–15 years of age	Lower Secondary School (formerly preparatory/intermediate school) (Cycle 2)
16–18 years of age	Upper Secondary/Vocational Technical Secondary School (Cycle 3)
Technical education for +16 year old: Teach trade and commercial skills	Trade Schools and Agricultural Institutes Technical education for +16 year old: Teach Trade
+16 year old: Provide a diploma in agriculture and practical education on running and administration of farms	Agricultural Institutes
Some primary, intermediate, and secondary schools specialize in theological studies, and this is stressed in their curriculum throughout the school years	Theological Education
To train teachers for all school levels	Teacher Training Institutes
Provide education for adults who may have missed schooling as children	Adult education schools
Undergraduate and postgraduate education in various disciplines	University

(UNESCO, 2015)

The second stage is the primary schools for children aged six to nine years. This stage provides a rich learning experience to encourage students to continue their academic journey (UAE Government Portal, 2018). In the UAE, basic education is intended to increase pupils' overall behaviors, abilities, and achievements, strengthen the Muslim faith, and teach children religion (UNESCO, 2011). One of the key educational goals at this stage is to reinforce students' cultural identity and the Islamic Arab community. Another aim is to promote better quality and accuracy for education and knowledge while building their creativity, imagination, and innovation competencies based on their abilities (UNESCO, 2011).

The third stage is intermediate or lower secondary education. This level aims to foster young students' futures and help them develop to the fullest. At this stage of education, students interested in vocational education may change to a secondary technical school (UAE Government Portal, 2018). The subjects covered are Islamic, Arabic, English, science, mathematics, social studies, history, geography, physical education, arts, music, home economics, life skills, and computer (UNESCO, 2011).

The fourth stage is the upper secondary/technical education for students who finished grades 10 to 12 at this level. The students here are ready to continue their careers and business positions (UAE Government Portal, 2018). Students in this stage study Arabic, Islamic studies, geography, social studies, mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, and geology during the first grade of higher education (grade 10). Schools then require students to choose the subjects they want to learn depending on their higher education interests (called the secondary technical school phase). Main subjects remain mandatory and are taught alongside the chosen subjects of the student. The main subjects are Arabic, Islamic, social studies, mathematics, and physics (UNESCO, 2011).

The upper secondary/technical education aims to equip students with the necessary skills to achieve higher education and satisfy the needs of the labor market. It also encourages students graduating from secondary schools to study immediately in universities without a founding year that is dropped by 2018 (UAE Government Portal, 2018). At this stage in the UAE, students train for compulsory enrollment in technical, medical, and natural science programs. After this level, a high school certificate is

awarded to the student, indicating that 12 years of compulsory education have elapsed. Upon completing this degree, students who complete professional high school will be given a technical secondary diploma (UAE Government Portal, 2018).

2.7.3 Higher Education

In the UAE, higher education is provided through universities, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning. Degrees, diplomas, and certificates are the primary products offered by these establishments. In contrast, colleges tend to be smaller, with fewer students in each class and more one-on-one attention from faculty members. Master's and doctorate degrees are available via universities; however, you need a bachelor's degree. Faculty time and attention are split between research and teaching at prominent institutions. They are offered at this level, from one-year technical diplomas to four-year bachelor's degrees. Six years are required to complete the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degrees (UNESCO, 2011). The majority of Emirati students strive to study in public universities and colleges, as they are funded by the government and offer education for free; however, numerous private institutions also have high quality. Figure 2 represents the number of students across all UAE in each degree level (i.e., bachelors, certificate, diploma/associate, doctorate, foundation, graduate diploma, higher diploma, and master), and most of them pursue bachelor degrees (CAA, 2020).

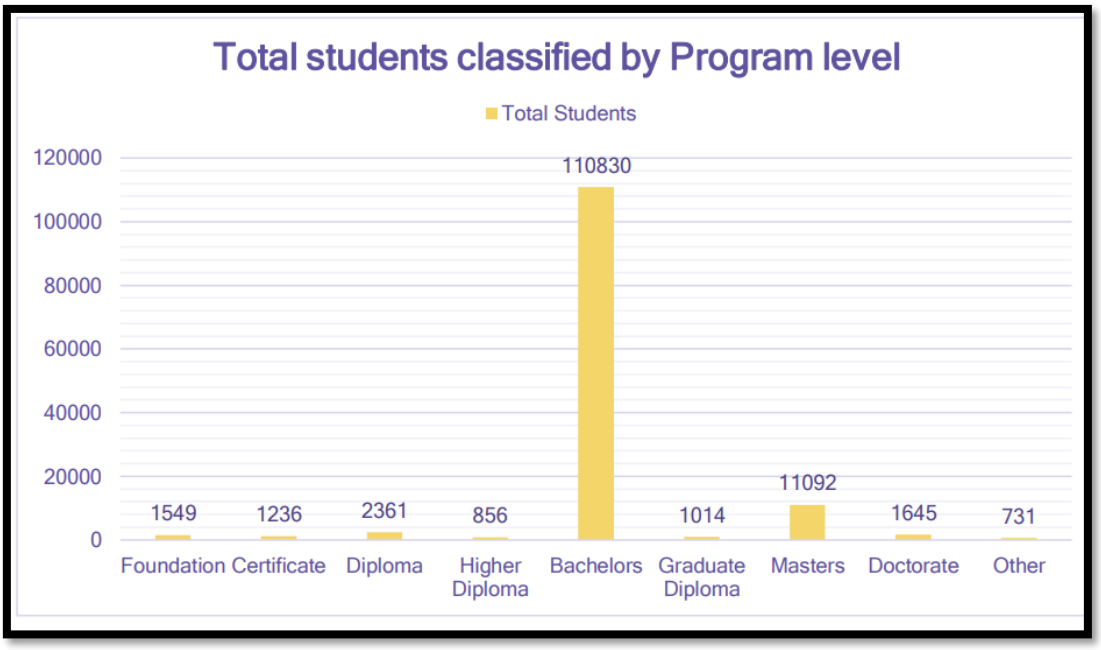

Figure 2: Number of Students Across all UAE in Each Degree Level (CAA, 2020)

The UAE has several public higher education institutions. Only UAE citizens and the offspring of UAE national women are eligible to use these services. The Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) examines students' abilities in arithmetic and English before admitting them to higher education (CAA, 2020).

The majority of UAE high school graduates want to pursue a postsecondary degree, making the country's university enrollment rate among the world's highest. Free university and college education, as well as textbooks, workbooks, school uniforms, and transportation to and from school, is provided for UAE nationals. In addition, for students at the institution, free dormitory housing and access to school medical services are included (CAA, 2020).

Students in the UAE have access to various private institutions, many of which have received international accreditation, in addition to public ones. It is the responsibility of the MoE's CAA to certify private colleges. English is the primary teaching language at most private institutions attended by expatriate students. For example, more than 80% of Dubai's postsecondary institutions are private colleges and universities. Approximately 63% of enrollment at private universities in Dubai is for bachelor's programs, whereas only 31% is for master's programs. The balance is for

primary, higher degrees, and other programs. In addition, 52.7% of students are enrolled in business courses, 15.7% in engineering, 7.6% in computer technology, 7.3% in media and design, and 5.1% in architecture and construction, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics. The UAE government has formed several agreements with US universities to improve education in the UAE and promote interactions between Western and Arab cultures on a global scale in addition to private and public schools. Because of this, the UAE is home to a variety of foreign colleges and programs (KHDA, 2011).

2.7.4 UAE Education Management Bodies

In 1972, the MoE was established for monitoring schools in the UAE. The MoE is responsible for general education, literacy, and adult education (UNESCO, 2011). The MoE must also report to government offices and agencies with ultimate educational responsibilities. The role and purpose of the MoE are to provide the opportunity for the students to develop their spiritual, mental, social, psychological, and philosophical learning potentials to balance their social needs to ensure that they remain steadfast in the modern age of social and economic development (Ministry of Education, 2022). The MoE is now the primary agency for educational policy in the UAE, whereas other educational institutions are responsible for the regulation and execution of educational policy. Emirates' specific organizations, such as KHDA and ADEC, contribute to education development.

All education ministers (listed in Figure 2) implemented the Islamic essentials at any level of UAE education, where male and female students receive education separately (Gaad, 2010). In addition, public colleges have students from diverse cultures and sectors. Students of all faiths have the freedom to learn and practice their creeds and are provided with free time during Islamic teaching. The goals for the MoE's policy are posted on its website to ensure the inclusive quality of education, to achieve excellent leadership and efficient educational efficiency, and to ensure the quality of educational and institutional performance. The MoE aims to provide an educational and safe environment conducive to learning and prepare higher education students both internally and externally in line with the needs of the labor market. Moreover, alignment with the

capacity of science research and innovation is implemented in line with the quality, efficiency, and standards of the administration. Finally, the common goal of the MoE is to be the central decision maker for UAE education policy.

Table 5: Ministers of Education in the UAE

Period	Minister
1971 – 1973	Sheikha Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi
1973 – 1979	Abdulla bin Omran Train
1979 – 1983	Saeed Salman
1983 – 1990	Hamad bin Abdulrahman Al Medfa'h
1990 – 1997	Faraj Al Mazrouei
1997 – 2004	Ali Abdul Aziz al Sharhan
2004 – 2006	Sheikh Nehyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan
2006 – 2009	Hanif Hasan Ali Al Qasim
2009 – 2014	Humaid Mohammed Obaid Al Qatani
2014 – Present	Husain Ibrahim Al Hammadi

(United Arab Emirates Cabinet, 2022)

The MoE divides the education system into nine zones (Table 5). Three zones are in the state's capital: the Abu Dhabi area, the Al-Ain area, and the eastern region, preceded by each education district in other countries, as shown in Figure 3. The data, advice, and resources are given from the MoE to education zones and councils. Each school is managed in its respective area by an educational authority. For example, Dubai-based KHDA manages the three regions covered by the Abu Dhabi Education Council, followed by the four remaining councils. Such councils have full statutory power over all stages of education (UNESCO, 2011).

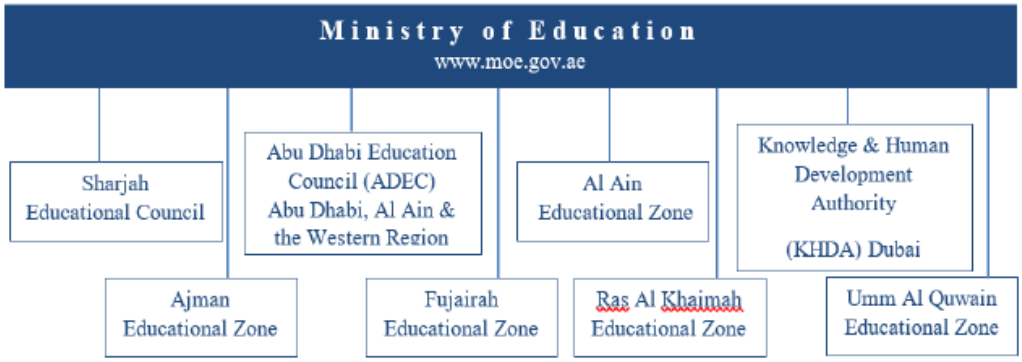

Figure 3: New Education Structure in the UAE
(Ministry of Education, 2022)

The ADEC is an educational agency founded in Abu Dhabi in 2005, which aims to help achieve the new government's socio-economic goals and improve the quality of education. In September 2017, ADEC was appointed as a new government department under a decree issued by the United States Educational Journal President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (The National, 2017). UNESCO (2011) defined the ADEC as an autonomous institution aimed at developing and implementing innovative education policies and programs to improve education in the Abu Dhabi Emirates and supporting educational institutions and employees in a manner that contributes toward achieving national development goals. The ADEC is now named ADEK (The National, 2017).

2.7.5 Education Leaders in the UAE

The rising diversity of cultural ideas and leadership styles in educational institutions underscores the importance of considering a variety of perspectives on educational leadership (Shah, 2006). The task of education in Islam is to offer a comprehensive growth of humans that incorporates Islam's religious, cultural, political, financial, economic, and personal welfare (Ashraf, 2012; Nasr et al., 1985). From an Islamic viewpoint, leadership in education consists of exchanging knowledge with others while retaining a strong sense of religious identity. The essential educational objectives emphasize spiritual ideals, modesty, and religion (Jacobson, 2006).

The MoE mainly controls education in schools in the UAE by maintaining the formation of curriculum taught in schools and by ensuring that the Islamic principles and

Arabic language are enhanced while re-establishing the curriculum to support the needs of a modern and dynamic economy. Nearly all schools, except for KG12 and some primary schools, are in a single-gender environment. Some content is not included in the UAE curriculum, such as political studies, material related to evolution theory, and sexuality, whereas some are emphasized, such as health and safety education (Al Nowais, 2004).

As a response to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund recognizing that unemployment of nationals is a major obstacle in the Gulf countries' progress, the GCC has launched initiatives to increase national employment. The UAE introduced Emiratization, which was a shared responsibility between the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the National Human Resources Development and Employment Authority (TANMIA) (Al-Ali, 2008). Emiratization was a major step that the UAE has launched to increase nationals' employment in all sectors, in particular, the private sector (i.e., localization). The objective of this project is to regulate and obligate these sectors to include nationals in the labor market and increase their contribution to the UAE economy. Some of the quotas and incentives employed to achieve this goal include mandates specifying a percentage of locals to be employed in each company or organization (UAE Government, 2022).

After the Emiratization program, numerous calls have been made to localize the education sector, as many believed that "Emiratis need to be involved more in the teaching/learning process of their own people, and this is seen as one of the key issues in the Emiratization process" (Raven, 2011, p. 137). UAE schools, as mentioned before, depended on teachers mainly from the MENA region because they were easily accessible; however, as Raven (2011) indicated, they practiced teaching in outdated pedagogical methods that relied mostly on rote learning and memorization. The government was compelled to bring Western and English expatriates as foreign language (EFL) teachers, as they used updated and non-traditional teaching methods which relied mainly on rote learning and therefore resulted in demotivating young learners. They also utilize student-centered approaches and encourage students to be more autonomous and motivated. However, after a while, cultural challenges have surfaced. One of these issues is the impact of culture on students' learning styles, which only Emiratis can relate to

(Raven, 2011). Another issue that has more impact is how teachers can affect students' national identity over time.

Another significant and most recent education reform that was conducted by the ADEC is the New School Model (NSM) in the emirates of Abu Dhabi. NSM is intended to enhance teachers' professional development and to establish comprehensive teaching and learning in K-12. Given its success, the MoE and ADEC decided to spread this model throughout the UAE. The main aspects of this model include decentralization of the education system, granting schools autonomy and thus empowering them, and empathizing with a student-centered approach to teaching and learning. The most important objectives of the NSM project are to adapt the curriculum to suit new socioeconomic developments, develop teachers and school leaders, and improve students' English language and math skills. The most important objectives of the NSM project are to adapt the curriculum to suit new socioeconomic developments, develop teachers and school leaders, and improve students' English language and math skills (Azaza, 2018).

To regulate educational leadership licensure, MoE and higher education collaborated to develop skill-based assessments for school leaders, which encompass principals, vise-principals, and cluster managers. The objective of these assessments is to identify areas of improvement and to design programs to improve these areas. In these assessments, applicants must also demonstrate leadership abilities, such as coaching and training teachers, mentoring school staff, and inspiring them to improve teaching and learning. These standards include both educational and operational leadership aspects of schools, as their main purpose is to ensure that schools are equipped with well-prepared leaders by applying effective licensure procedures. Assessments of skills include leadership skills, communication, and collaboration skills, and school vision and data analysis while containing professional and ethical standards, strategic leadership, educational leadership, and operational leadership, as depicted in Table 6 (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Table 6: Assessment of School Leadership Skills

School Leaders Licensure Assessment – Proposed Structure of the Assessment		
Content Categories		Approximate Number of Questions
Section I (MC & short-response)		
I.	Professional and Ethical Leadership	10
II.	Strategic Leadership	25
III.	Educational Leadership	25
IV.	Operational Leadership	20
Section II (constructed response)		
I.	Establishing and Sustaining School Vision and Goals	1
II.	Leading Teaching and Learning	1
III.	Leading Capacity Building and Professional Learning at School	1

The perceptions of principals, vice-principal, and teachers on selection criteria and requirement procedures were investigated by Alhelali (2014). He pointed out that participants acknowledged that they needed a strong degree and training in skilled teaching, especially if the principal is bilingual. The planning time needed for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) key training for a total of 6.5 groups will be best considered if ADEC requires a particular training/diploma that will assist the leader in his or her job position. They argued that the English language prerequisite was not important as well. A significant number of respondents thought that the basic qualities of an applicant for school principal would be included in the screening methods. Therefore, the applicant should be tested based on his sociological and psychological features as a leader.

The primary task of the principal is managing the education of the school community and promoting a commitment of all staff to achieve high standards in all areas of the school's work (Leithwood et al., 2003, 2004). The school director also guides school achievement. In other words, the principal has a central role in developing the entire school. Furthermore, the principal is responsible for promoting the prestige of the school by maintaining high educational standards, having a consistent evaluation of

the performance of the school, continuing to improve and enhance the education standards, making effective and efficient use of resources in the pursuit of education, building leadership capacity within a school, and engaging all parents and community stakeholders in the education of students (Bush, 2007).

The main indicator of a principal's effectiveness is how teaching and learning are improved to make students' progress. In the context of ADEK's strategic plan, the school principal must assist in managing and organizing it and achieving its goals and objectives through a common vision. The leadership style of school leaders is equally critical in assisting them in performing their obligations while maintaining a culture of excellence promotion, expectation equalization, and understanding of employee needs.

2.8 The Position of Emirati Women in Education

The keen interest of the country in providing education for women began long before calls for Emiratization or nationalization. Around 30 Emirati women were in the first cohort sent to Egypt to receive formal education in 1956, and this had increased to 381 women in 1958. In 1964, the Kuwait Bureau, which oversaw formal education in the Trucial States, employed two Emirati women to teach in newly formed female schools. By 1971, roughly 32,800 Emirati women were enrolled in formal schooling (Daleure, 2017b).

To satisfy parents' anxieties about gender mixing, neighborhood schools were built separately for girls and boys following nationalization, with all-female administrators and teachers in the girls' schools. With 350 schools now established across the country, around 94,000 youngsters were being educated. When the United Arab Emirates (UAE) University was launched in 1977, about 185 of the first group of students to be enrolled were females. As a result of these efforts, there was a significant drop in female illiteracy, which fell from 77.6% in 1980 to 30% in 1985 (Al Abed et al., 2008).

When Zayed University (ZU) was founded in 1998, it provided postsecondary educational opportunities for Emirati women, which were equal to those provided for males. Many of the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) have larger schools for

women than for their male counterparts, since the women attending outnumber the men, and in meeting the women's career aspirations, several of the female campuses provide a wider range of programs than those offered in the male campuses (Findlow, 2007). The barriers that frequently impact less affluent women are addressed by providing safe and dependable transportation, and local rulers frequently provide financial support for students' transportation costs (Daleure, 2005).

According to Abdulla (2005), most Emirati women who pursue higher education come from homes where men have significantly greater access to education and a wider range of work options. Male schools were established a decade before female schools. Despite these challenges, women have shown significant success in their educational pursuits over the years thanks to strong UAE government backing, free access to both general and higher education, and the existence of gender-segregated schools. However, this equality has not been reflected in their career options: in 2003, only 14.7% of women worked in the public sector, although this was a major improvement relative to earlier years.

According to the UAE Constitution and Islamic laws, women should be equal to men in their access to education, their career choices, and their rights to inheritance. The drop in women's illiteracy rate indicates their progress in the UAE: illiteracy had dropped to 7.6% in 2005, while in years since then, the number of female students has surpassed the number of male students. Females now represent 56.3% of all students in the UAE and 70.8% of students attending universities. These figures are indicative of the huge strides that have been made, but the UAE government still considers women's issues a "work in progress" (El Khouli, 2013).

The schooling system in the UAE is divided into three tiers: six years of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school (Abdulla, 2005). Since education is of the utmost importance, it is free for all nationals. This has led to a dramatic increase in the number of women enrolled in educational institutions. In 1987, women comprised 47% of the total number of high school graduates (Abdulla, 2005). However, this percentage had risen to 62% by 1997. A similar change has also been observed in higher education institutions, with the proportion of women increasing from

39% in 1977 to 79% in 1997 (Abdulla, 2005). While no clear data are available for the graduation rate of Emirati women, it is expected to be far higher now than it was for the previous generation. Many young Emirati women are now accessing higher education, although Emirati men had access to it far earlier than the women. Women were given access to schools in the 1960s, while men already had this in the 1950s. Regardless of their late start, Emirati women have caught up quickly considering their original educational disparity (Abdulla, 2005).

2.9 History and Background of Vocational Training in the UAE

Technical schools were first established in the 1980s, together with the UAE's Higher Colleges of Technology, thus drawing attention to the significance of vocational training and education (Godwin, 2006). This development was based on the belief that vocational training would benefit the economy by supplying industries with skilled workers in areas where they were needed. This, in turn, would decrease unemployment by providing viable employment opportunities for those unable to finish their formal education, thus providing them with financial stability.

The national cultural heritage of the UAE shows that vocational knowledge is not a new concept in the country: Skills and crafts have traditionally been transferred from one generation to another, such as Al Sadu weaving skills, Talli decorative embroidery, Al Khous palm frond weaving, pottery making, and sewing, all primarily practiced by women. Pearl diving, fishing, farming, trading, and sheep and camel grazing have been traditional male domains.

The practice of these traditional vocational skills was held in high regard in society, as these were considered the lifeblood of the UAE's economy prior to the 1960s. However, the pathway to the discovery of oil in the country had already been paved by the signing of an agreement with the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) in the 1930s. This resulted in the establishment of local oil companies, such as the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADCO) and the Abu Dhabi Marine Operating Company (ADMA) in the 1960s. These offered technical and vocational training to young male nationals (Al Shaikh, 2008). After the discovery of oil, these basic vocational training initiatives and the traditional ways of doing schooling took a new turn so they could meet the country's

emerging economic needs, reflected not only in oil-related industries but also in the service sector. During this period, the country's educational system advanced several steps and even outperformed the systems of its Arab neighbors.

Technical and vocational skills have thus been taught within the UAE educational system for some time. According to a Dubai-based development agency, specialized industrial schools first appeared in Sharjah in 1958 and then in Dubai and Ras Al Khaima in 1969 (Al-Assi, 1993). In Dubai, there was only one commercial school, which offered evening classes to employees, primarily from the banks and corporations. In Ras Al Khaima, an agricultural institute was founded in 1955 to research new agricultural techniques, and this was later developed into a school that admitted students. This institute sets itself apart by providing students with a monthly stipend and lodging (Al-Assi, 1993).

Since 1971, the UAE's general education system, particularly its vocational training system, has undergone significant adjustments to keep up with advancements in these areas in other nations. Previously, vocational training was available only to workers or to those who had not completed their studies; it has recently been extended and is now available as an alternative to higher education. The design of secondary schools and vocational training institutes was largely borrowed from the West's models and curricula. As a result of this process, the Applied Technology High School (ATHS), the Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute (ADVETI), and the Secondary Technical School (STS) were founded in 2005, 2007, and 2010, respectively. The ADVETI was established using both German and Australian vocational training principles (Ridge et al., 2015).

A group of German vocational training professionals and national and Arab administrative employees founded ADVETI in a modest office in the facilities of the Ministry of Education. To comprehend the logic behind adopting an Australian model, it is necessary to understand the differences between the German and Australian models: The German vocational training system mixes apprenticeship with vocational education, requiring students to spend three to four years completing their studies while alternating between theoretical classrooms and governmental or private businesses (Al Afifi, 2016).

This “dual system” builds a robust infrastructure and is treated very seriously in Germany by both the vocational and economic systems. It does not require any International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or other English criteria, since it focuses solely on training and practice, and it provides learners with secure positions as part of their apprenticeship scholarships (Pollmann-Schult & Mayer, 2004).

In contrast, the Australian model is more congruent with the UAE education system, where the learner is not limited exclusively to vocational training and therefore requires the IELTS or the Emirates Standardized Test (EmSAT) qualification. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Australia and the UAE, according to which cooperation is established between these two countries in the areas of higher education and vocational education and training. This is done through regular consultation and the exchange of information (i.e., policies, curricula, standards, accreditation systems, etc.) (MoU, 2021).

According to Al Hammadi and Mohiuddin (2017), 10 of the country’s 73 approved higher education institutions provide vocational education and training (VET). At the top of the list of these vocational and technical institutes are ADVETI, the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), Abu Dhabi Polytechnic (ADPoly), the National Institute for Vocational Education (NIVE), United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Fatima College for Health Sciences (FCHS), Dubai Aerospace Enterprise (DAE), and the Ajman University of Science and Technology (AUST).

The UAE’s vocational sector is still developing, with programs that were previously offered in a haphazard way across several commercial and public institutes now being rationalized in the form of technical and vocational colleges for students graduating from high school. This trend has also impacted UAE Ministry of Education (MoE) schools, and there are plans to integrate the existing vocational streams, from Grades 9 to 12, under the name the Applied Stream. That stream is designed for learners who are more inclined toward vocational and applied learning, and the plan is that it will equip Emirati students with core life skills and vocational expertise that will increase their employability. These specialized skills will be related to applied business enterprise; applied health and social care; applied technology; applied events

management; applied interactive multimedia; applied environment, health, and safety; applied logistics; applied travel, tourism, and leisure; and future emerging skills (Ministry of Education, 2022).

As the field of vocational training evolves and expands in the UAE, disparities in the entrance criteria, graduation outcomes, and academic standards, and duplications in the vocational programs and certifications offered are becoming increasingly apparent. In fact, there are significant variations in how vocational training programs are implemented. Some, especially those in the private sector, have more lenient standards in terms of completion and delivery schedules, whereas others, mainly those in the public sector, are more stringent. However, graduates from all the programs receive the same credentials, which are accredited by the National Quality Authority (NQA). Furthermore, the entrance policies for governmental vocational institutes differ from those for private professional training schools. Many private vocational institutes accept a bare minimum of qualifications, particularly the English requirement, while others have a mix of academic and occupational requirements. All these variations produce gaps and inefficiencies in the vocational system, which, while understandable, result in the inefficient use of resources, confusion, and inconsistency (Al-Ali, 2008).

Furthermore, the graduates of technical and applied technology secondary schools are not always directed toward vocational institutes. On the contrary, most students prefer to enroll in bachelor's programs in public universities and colleges, such as UAEU and HCT, or in other private academic institutions. Because these schools have rigorous admissions standards, most applicants are the top performers who are quickly accepted into these universities and colleges and as a result vocational institutes are usually deprived of the top students.

To align the Abu Dhabi vocational training and education with both the NQA and MoE accreditation requirements, the students must fulfill both vocational and academic graduation requirements in the hopes of receiving MoE accreditation, which, in the long run, is a worthy objective, as MoE-accredited academic credentials are recognized by the Human Resources Authority (HRA) and the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources (FAHR). However, in comparison to students who are studying in other

institutes with lower prerequisites, some of these students regard the academic prerequisites as uncalled for overload because they would not receive MoE academic diplomas. On the other hand, there are reports that FAHR has now added the NQA certificate levels to its grading scale, but in practice, many vocational diploma holders are hired in jobs with lower grades than those with academic diplomas (Al-Ali, 2008).

The number of governmental STS, ATHS, and Vocational Education Development Centers (VEDC) schools in the UAE had dropped from 20 to eight in 2019. This means that schools in Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, and Ajman had been closed. At the same time, the number of vocational and educational training institutes dropped from five to three, as some had merged (ACTVET, 2019).

According to the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, the total number of national students who joined the secondary school stage (Grades 10 to 12) in 2013 was 221,065, of which 52.8% were female. In the same year, 8,890 national students joined technical schools, 30.7% of whom were female. These statistics indicate that the number of national students joining technical schools is considerably lower compared to those joining general schools, and that a particularly low number of females join the technical schools. These preferences are also reflected in the students' career choices. For example, in 2015, female nationals represented 5% of the overall technical labor force and 45.3% of the national technical labor force (Ministry of Human Resources & Emiratizations, 2020).

To consider this from another perspective, according to the official MoE statistics, in Al Ain for example, 6,386 Grade 12 students graduated from public and private schools in 2019, but of these, only about 0.2% went on to public vocational training institutes to continue their education (Ministry of Education, 2022). Because of their excellent academic record, the majority of these graduates preferred to enroll in higher education institutions to obtain a bachelor's degree (Trading Economics, 2022). The number of students enrolled in vocational and technical schools in the UAE, therefore, cannot be used to predict enrollment in postsecondary vocational training and education programs.

Many developing countries consider having a strong vocational training sector to be an important part of their educational system because it provides students with the skills and competencies that employers demand. In 2012, foreign workers made up 90% of the local labor market and 80% of the population in the UAE. Consequently, overcoming both the concrete and intangible costs associated with the country's social, cultural, political, and economic development is a struggle. One of the most noticeable outcomes is increased unemployment among nationals due to excessive reliance on foreign labor. This has numerous socio-political and demographic ramifications, and results in the nationals being a minority in their own country. The solution to this dilemma is first to reduce old social and cultural beliefs and the stigma associated with certain vocational jobs and with working in the private sector, and then to enhance the national workforce by providing more technical and vocational training (Alzaabi, 2012).

As Billett (2011) emphasizes, the educational sector has been "positioned historically and societally" (p. 2) for an extended period of time, and it has mostly been dominated by the voices of powerful "others" who attempt to control and reshape it rather than by those who are working in the field and who actually practice it. Billet suggests that the purposes, background, and processes of vocational education should be clarified, that it should be recognized as having its own merit, and that distinctions should be drawn between vocational education and the vocational educational sector as a starting point in counteracting this stigma.

2.10 VET Institutes' Position in the UAE Educational System

Figure 4 shows the position of vocational education and training institutes on a map of the UAE educational system. Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) manages ADVETI and Institute of Applied Technology (IAT) institutes, such as ADPoly and FCHS. It ensures that these institutes' programs are accredited and meet international standards. In contrast, higher education universities and colleges, both public and private, fall under the umbrella of the higher education system.

Technical secondary schools, such as VEDC and STS, are supposedly streamed to join the IAT and ADVETI institutes. However, the majority tend to join higher education

universities and colleges, since they meet the higher educatio0n system requirements and admission criteria. Abu Dhabi Education Counsel (ADEC) now oversees the Applied Technology High School, which was previously under ACTVET (ACTVET, 2019).

In the UAE, not all institutes favor the vocational education and training system. At an external level, there appears to be unbiased, flexible, and systematic mobility within the educational system. However, despite vocational training and education graduates having the ability to move from one institute to another, issues such as a lack of subject equivalency hinder their progress through the educational ladder. Despite the vocational path supposedly available for STS secondary school graduates, few of these students select vocational institutes for completing their studies. According to the database extracted from the institute's system in 2019, only 14 (2%) of the 653 STS secondary school graduates registered with one of the vocational education and training institutes (ACTVET, 2019).

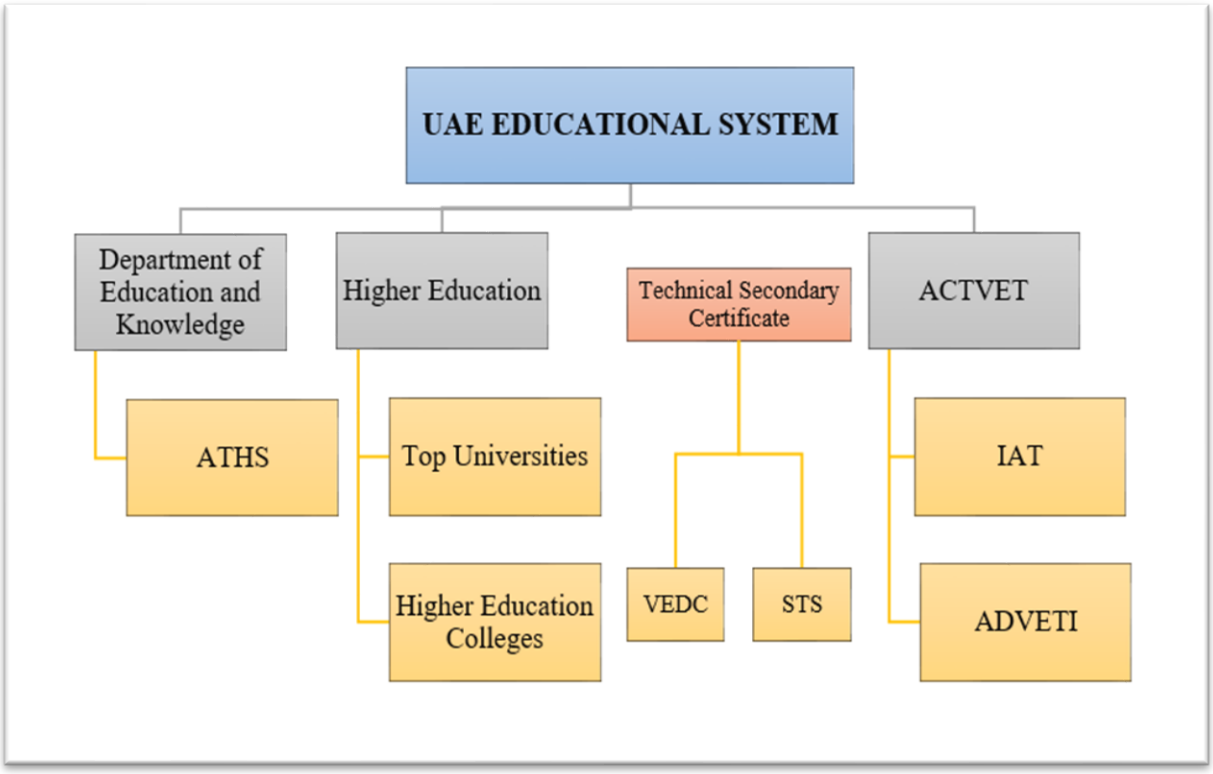

Figure 4: The Relative Positions of Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE Educational System
(ACTVET, 2019)

Before graduating from Grade 12, all students must register with the National Admissions and Placement Office (NAPO) and select their preferred educational institute. They are immediately routed into vocational training and education institutes if they are not approved or do not fulfil the higher education institutes' criteria, even though VET may not be their first choice.

The UAE education system is an open system in which organizations are interdependent and continuously adapt and modify according to the external environment. The vocational training and education sector, as an organizational structure, interacts with its environment to survive, and its smaller components fit together, changing, and modifying their behavior as needed, as in any other social system. The essence of an open system is that its various parts work together to achieve a particular objective, and if they interact smoothly and efficiently, the system will be stable. On the other hand, if one of the subsystems is dysfunctional, the other parts will be forced to adapt to make up for this deficiency.

In other words, an open system is one that is affected by its surrounding external environment in the form of inputs, and it then chooses its process inputs. It returns some of these inputs in the form of outputs to the external environment, as shown in Figure 5. For example, if a school or institute receives negative feedback from external evaluators, it will change one of its system components in response (Marion & Gonzales, 2013). Although STS students benefit from the system's open characteristics in that they are free to navigate their choices to meet their academic performance objectives, it also creates stigma when students with low academic performance are automatically enrolled in vocational training. Attempts to correct this flaw can be seen in the MoE's recent implementation of vocational routes, which begin in ninth grade and continue throughout high school. This aims to ensure that vocational path secondary school graduates are smoothly funneled into vocational training institutes.

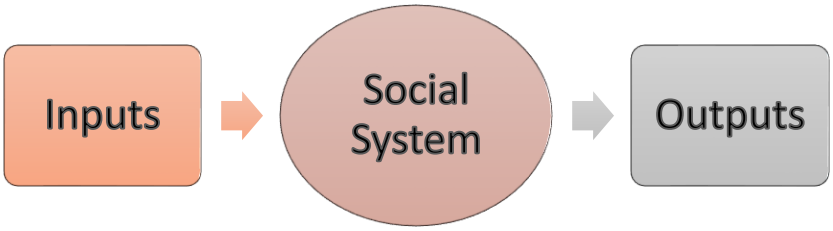

Figure 5: Open Systems' Dynamics

2.11 Regulatory Bodies for VET in the UAE

The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 states that vocational training is one of the main pillars that the UAE government is striving to achieve. According to this strategy, the UAE government aims to equip its nationals with the technical and practical skills essential for the nation's future economic development, both in the public and private sectors. The government aims to achieve a more holistic and innovative educational system through research programs and creative vocational training agendas (Al Falasi, 2017).

In keeping with this policy, the UAE aims to deliver vocational skills to learners across the Emirates. The goal is to establish a sustainable and diversified economy that can compete economically, regionally, and globally by utilizing and harnessing emerging technologies (UAE Government, 2018). As a result, a national system that ensures high-quality technical education, technical training, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems must be established to ensure that every student in the UAE receives vocational and technical skills. Countries with highly developed economies, such as the United States, China, and Japan, have largely adopted this strategy in their educational systems, stressing vocational training (Raven, 2011).

Various regulatory bodies have been established to implement the government's commitment to this issue, including Vocational Education and Training Awards Council (VETAC) (National Qualifications Authority, 2012), a supervisory and regulatory body at the federal level. This was set up to manage and coordinate vocational, technical, and professional education in the UAE, under the authority of the NQA.

One of the UAE government's current key goals is for many graduates to receive vocational training (KHDA, 2018). The UAE considers this vital due to the requirement

to increase levels of understanding and to cooperate in providing training that meets technical standards. The region's economy has become increasingly diverse, necessitating a wide range of talents. For a long time, the UAE has concentrated on its graduates having advanced professional degrees (Kirk & Napier, 2009). However, the number of professionals needed in the industrial and vocational sectors has decreased dramatically. The government's decision to now focus on vocational training is based on the need for new technologies, industrial expansion, and socioeconomic development (National Qualifications Authority, 2012). In this regard, the government engages with a variety of institutions and bodies to ensure that proper policy guidelines are in place for the expansion of the TVET system.

As a result, learners across the Emirates must be equipped with vocational skills if the UAE is to support the development of technologies and to achieve a sustainable, diverse economy. It needs to establish a national vocational training system that will ensure quality and sustainability (Raven, 2011). With this goal in mind, the government has made significant investments in vocational training and service delivery, with several government ministries being entrusted with the program's implementation. In addition, various regulating agencies have been established to ensure that vocational training institutes provide high-quality services (Raven, 2011).

One of the central policies developed to assist in the success of TVET programs aims to enhance the accessibility of these programs. The training system has been developed in such a way that it provides multiple opportunities for Emirati students who have the will to pursue their educational endeavors but have limited academic capabilities. Features that give both flexibility and quality have been designed into the system to help students achieve professionalism in their own training areas. System flexibility is essential in allowing new and prospective students to join while still undertaking normal activities. One of the system's main advantages is that all UAE nationals can switch between programs. Therefore, nationals seeking vocational training at the secondary school level are free to join the program at the intermediate level. This standard, also referred to as "cycle two" of the study program, gives students the ability to attain the best type of diploma available in the region. Moreover, those who graduate from secondary technical schools can easily join vocational training institutes. Such

students will face the same requirements for admission as their counterparts from government institutions (Raven, 2011).

The NQA was founded on August 23, 2010, under Federal Decree No. 1, issued by the president of the UAE, H. H. Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. One of the main responsibilities of the NQA is to develop and maintain an Emirati national qualification framework in collaboration with relevant entities. This is accomplished by implementing a wide range of quality assurance processes to ensure high-quality education and training outcomes, particularly in the vocational sector. One of the NQA's key goals is to produce results that will help the UAE catch up with global scientific and technical breakthroughs while also meeting the country's economic and social requirements. Through a three-tier system of regulation (Figure 7), the NQA oversees the development of policies that ensure a unified national system of qualifications, maintain qualification regulations, meet economic needs, facilitate learner transfer between educational institutions, obtain national and international accreditation, promote the concept of lifelong learning, create a database for all training providers, and regulate workforce quality (National Qualifications Authority, 2014).

Other roles and responsibilities of the NQA include constructing a VET framework that is capable of ensuring the quality of professional qualifications that will meet industry criteria and the labor market's need for a trained workforce. It is also responsible for establishing partnerships with industry to focus on developing and endorsing national qualifications that are based on the National Occupational Skills Standards (NQ + NOSS), for aligning Emirates qualifications with foreign vocational qualifications, and for maintaining the awarding bodies' systems (National Qualifications Authority, 2012).

The NQA and VETAC are primarily responsible for setting the requirements and related frameworks for the quality assurance of qualifications and training providers since VETAC is considered the federal regulator of vocational education and training in the UAE. The process for ensuring VET quality operates within a structured framework that promotes accountability from all parties involved in maintaining adherence to the standards. The structural hierarchy has three layers (Figure 6): the Regulatory

Authorities, the Awarding Bodies, and the Registered Training Providers (National Qualifications Authority, 2012).

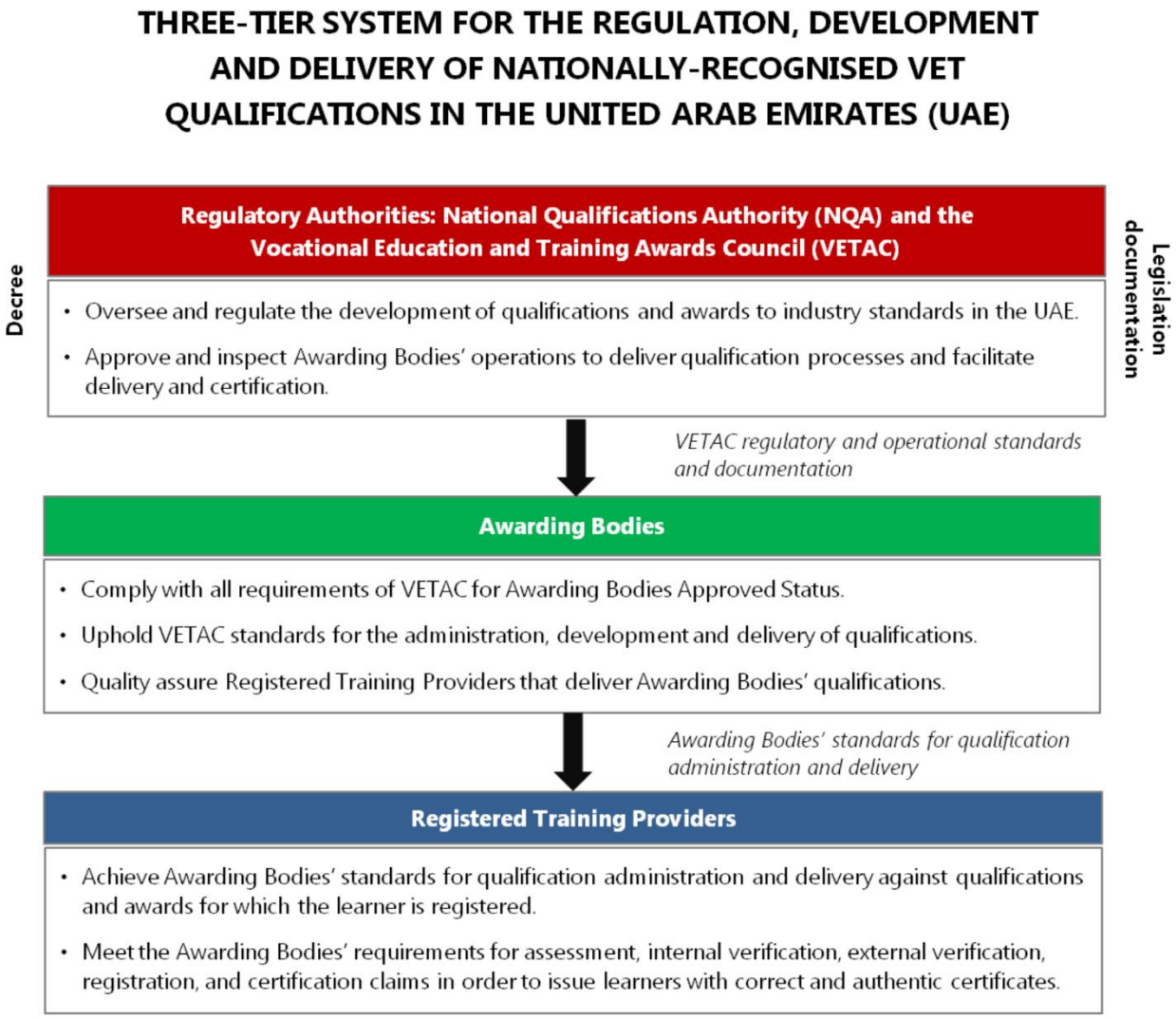

Figure 6: The Mechanisms for VET Quality Assurance
(National Qualifications Authority, 2014)

2.12 The UAE Labor Market

Since roughly the middle of the 20th century, and still sometimes evident in the 21st century, jobs and tasks have been classified by colors reflecting what is worn by workers in each job type. For instance, white-collar refers to administrative jobs, blue-collar refers to manual jobs, pink refers to service-oriented jobs, gray-collar refers to working beyond retirement, gold-collar refers to computer engineers and technicians, green-collar refers to environmentally related jobs, black-collar refers to mining and the oil industry, and so the list goes on (Ebersole, 2021). However, labor market criteria and

job classifications in the twenty-first century have evolved beyond these simple distinctions and have expanded to include a variety of soft and competency skills.

Stuart (1999) indicated that due to global competition, the revolution of the internet and the technological revolution that followed it, American business had either to lower their wages, and thus their production quality, or take advantage of these changes to create high-performance jobs: the latter option being the one of choice if the nation was to maintain its high-quality lifestyle. American businesses stress the importance of the lifelong development of skills, and training should be a central focus in meeting these challenges. Three out of every four workers now work in occupations that need less than an associate degree, although 56% of businesses say that restructuring and the introduction of new technologies have increased the skill requirements of non-managerial personnel. Many organizations are looking for individuals with diverse skills, including the basic, technical, and organizational, and company-specific knowledge. Of these, technical, organizational, and company-specific abilities are the most needed. The importance of investing in the training and education of employees is indicated by data showing that employers who provide training for their employees observe a 15% to 20% average increase in productivity. College graduates earn 77% more than high school graduates, and workers with more training and education experience less unemployment and greater ease of job transfer and mobility (Stuart, 1999).

According to the Qualification Framework Handbook of 2012, the skills needed include generic skills, key skills, functional skills, core skills, employability skills, key competencies, essential skills, necessary skills, critical skills, field outcomes, and more. (National Qualifications Authority, 2012). Earlier research by the UAE Qualifications Framework Project identified the key competencies or generic skills most needed in various countries. These were divided into information skills, communication skills, organizing skills, working with others, numeracy skills, problem-solving skills, technology literacy, and societal skills. In the UAE, these are referred to as core life skills, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Most Common Generic Skills in many Countries

CoreLife Skills - labels for the generic skills	QFP generic skills areas*
1. Collecting, analysing, organising and applying information in a given context	1. Information
2. Communicating information, concepts and ideas	2. Communication
3. Initiating and organising self and activities, including motivation, exploration and creativity	3. Organising self
4. Working with others in teams including leadership	4. Working with others
5. Solving problems including using mathematical ideas and techniques	5. Numeracy 6. Problem-solving
6. Applying information and communication technology (ICT)	7. Technology
7. Participating in social and civic life including ethical practice	8. Societal

(National Qualifications Authority, 2012)

A study undertaken by Bin-Obaid (2003) found that GCC countries share similar economic features, with citizens employed primarily in the public sector and immigrant labor dominant in the private sector. Differences in pay between the public and private sectors, the oil sector's GPD, and private sector employment are some of the other commonalities between these countries. The findings of this study indicate that local and foreign labor forces complement each other in terms of productivity because they are evenly distributed across job types, with foreign labor forces generally being more productive. Foreigners compensate for the lack of ability of nationals in some fields. However, according to Bin-Obaid, levying fees or taxes on expatriates' salaries is not a viable strategy for boosting the economy. A preferable approach is to focus on teaching and training the national labor force and improving their work ethic to close the gap between national and foreign labor. Another option is to restructure employment regulations so that the private sector is the same as the public sector in terms of benefits, compensation, security, and the assistance available for small and medium-sized businesses (Bin-Obaid, 2003).

The UAE has made rapid economic progress in a short period of time, allowing it to reach levels comparable to those of many modern countries and, as a result, enhancing the country's profile. This has, however, been accompanied by concerns about the Emirati people's long-term employment prospects. In 2012, nationals made up less than

20% of the workforce, meaning they were a minority compared to expatriates. This results in demographic differences that influence the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of UAE society. Concerns have been expressed about national employment, particularly among new graduates who face tough competition from overseas laborers who are prepared to accept low salaries, particularly in the private sector. Another issue is that most positions in the private sector are not geared toward the skillsets of young graduates with a knowledge background. Two suggested alternatives are to make the private sector working environment more culturally responsive and to give expatriates more employment mobility. To increase labor market flexibility, the UAE government asked the private sector to treble the number of positions available for nationals in 2013. Providing more work opportunities for women is another significant aspect of this program (Daleure, 2017a).

Vocational training in the UAE offers a lot of promise by ensuring that the next generation of UAE citizens will be well prepared and able to transition easily into the local job market. This training can provide appealing employment options for young Emiratis, particularly those who battle academically, because the programs offered are of high quality and directly relevant to labor market needs. To attract prospective students and their families, marketing strategies could be developed that would reduce the stigma associated with vocational training. Offering workplace-based training programs to improve the abilities of those already working is another essential area on which to concentrate. Similar to ACTVET, national governmental mechanisms should be established to oversee vocational training needs, particularly in less developed emirates, and to supervise private vocational training institutes (OECD, 2012).

2.13 Emirati Women's Position in the Labor Market

The low labor participation of women in the UAE is attributed to various factors, including family, economics, health, educational, and occupational constraints, in addition to gender disparity. Family impact has proven to be central in the socioeconomic environment of the UAE, as in other Arab countries. Other underlying factors at play—which are mainly related to Islamic and Arab culture—include the "code of modesty," which deems it unacceptable for women to work in a non-segregated work

environment, and the preference of women to work in the public sector rather than the private sector due to its security as well as its maternity and sick leave benefits (Abdulla, 2005).

In 2009, most women in the Gulf States worked in healthcare, education, and social care. Only a small percentage of women were employed in science-related or high-risk industries, such as architecture, engineering, and the diplomatic service. Furthermore, such fields of employment sometimes require women to be available during night shifts, which are deemed unsuitable or inappropriate for women. Furthermore, women in the Gulf States have traditionally been given minimal opportunities in terms of training and growth. Around 76% of women consider working in a mixed or non-segregated environment to be unfavorable, while 53% are reluctant to work in the private sector due to its low status (Metcalfe, 2011).

Since 2000, most Gulf States have made significant strides in women's participation in their labor forces, especially the UAE and Qatar. In this period, women's employment in the UAE has risen from 38% to 51%, and from 34% to 46% in Qatar. However, in 2018, the participation of women in the labor force in the whole Gulf region was only 25%, which is low compared to the world average of 48.6%. Even though women constitute half of the overall population in this region, and despite the UAE's recent increase in women's workforce participation, the increase has also been accompanied by high unemployment rates as women have surpassed their male counterparts in completing their higher education (Shayah & Sun, 2019).

Expatriates, mostly men, make up 89% of the UAE workforce, compared to nationals, who make up only 11% (Ewers, 2016). National men and women made up similar percentages of the population in 2015, but due to the large number of expatriate males, women are considered an overall minority in the UAE. The UAE government's attempts to address the under-representation of nationals in the workforce through expanded funding for the educational sector have resulted in females having open access to education, which has resulted in their increased workforce participation. Despite this, there is still gender disparity in the workplace, particularly at the executive level, which

results from long-standing social and cultural conventions that favor men (Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki, 2015).

According to Kemp and Zhao (2016), three main factors influence women's career choices: family, individual-level attitudes, and workplace development. As men are more dominant in the workplace, with 68% joining existing companies and 32% starting their own businesses, they are the main influencers of women's career choices.

Although the UAE has experienced remarkable progress in information communication technology (ICT), several factors affect Emirati women's decisions to participate in this area. These include the high fees for ICT courses, family commitments and obligations, the heavy workload of ICT jobs, and the difficulty of co-education in a male-dominated field. Males have greater access to computer-related technologies due to their dominant role in society. Despite the implementation of gender-segregated education, the job market does not reflect this, and ICT remains a male-dominated workplace (Zineddine & Kindi, 2011).

According to a study by Zineddine and Kindi (2011), economic, family, health, educational, and occupational constraints all impact Emirati women's decision to choose ICT in their education. In this study, 60% of the women indicated that using computers affected the time they spent with their families. Of this group, 92% preferred to spend time with their families rather than work with computers, while 97.3% indicated that computers affected their eyesight. Around half of the women in the study expressed dissatisfaction that men dominate ICT majors and that co-education in these courses is difficult. In addition to the males being the main decision makers in a family, many men do not like the women in their family to be working in a male-dominated career. More than half of the women indicated that the reason for their lack of participation in ICT was not the lack of computers in the workplace, nor a lack of willingness on the part of the organization to offer training courses, but rather that the time constraints are difficult for women, considering their commitments to their families.

According to Samulewicz et al. (2012), although approximately half of the women studying science, technology, and engineering (STE) plan to work after graduation, several factors hinder their aspirations. Many of them indicated that, after

graduation, they had opted to continue their education, this was largely due to a mismatch between their knowledge and the job requirements and the competition from better-qualified candidates. The women's lack of job counseling was reflected in their lack of confidence in their skills. In addition, 60% of Emirati women under this study were unaware of what the STE field offers. However, many of them preferred the STE working environment, as it offers opportunities for personal and professional growth, challenging tasks, high levels of responsibility, prestige, and recognition. Regarding private and public sector preferences, Emirati women living in Dubai and Abu Dhabi were more willing to work in the private sector than those living in other cities (Samulewicz et al., 2012). In their study, Samulewicz et al. (2012) found there was at least one working woman in 83% of Emirati female students' families. Having a female role model in the family, who was involved in the STE field, had a major influence on other women in the family. Samulewicz et al. (2012) also revealed stereotypes and distortions associated with STE that need to be addressed and changed. These include eliminating restrictions on mobility, as most of these jobs are concentrated in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, fostering an attractive job environment, and creating greater awareness of opportunities in the private sector. The distribution of jobs among UAE women is shown in Figure 7.

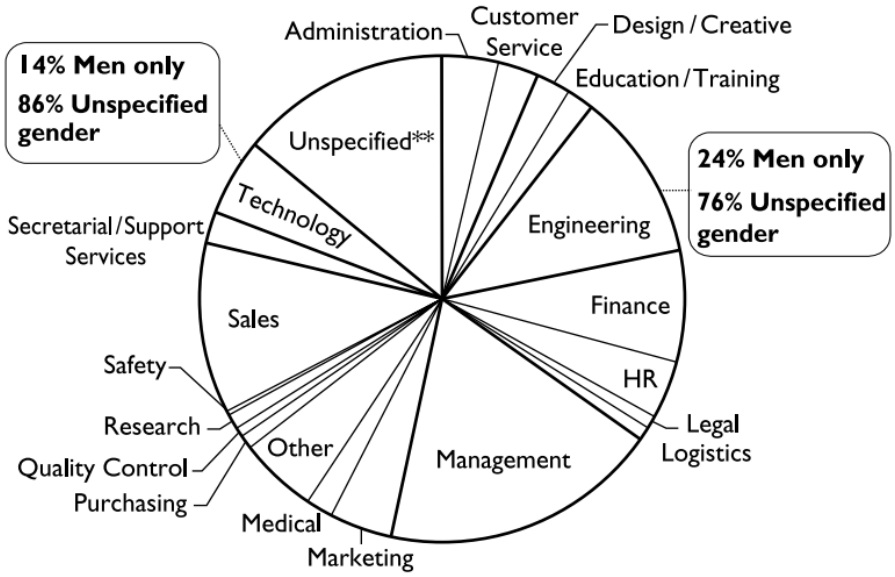

Figure 7: Analysis of UAE-Based Jobs Posted on the Bayt.com Website (Samulewicz et al., 2012)

As indicated by Mazawi (1999), Women employed in academia are often constrained to the lower ranks of the faculty, with limited research opportunities and a greater teaching load. In the Gulf region, certain countries have even greater gender disparities in this respect. For example, in 1996, women in Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia accounted for 30% of all faculty members. In contrast, UAE women have only 9% fewer academic career opportunities than men. Previous research has identified the roles played by men in the Arab educational system, where all decisions, all power, and all goals are, respectively, man-dictated, man-controlled, and man-conceived. Women in academia are frequently unable to capitalize on their education due to the strong hold of men on the higher positions. Stratification based on gender limits all the occupational opportunities available to women. Economically, women in the Gulf States, including the UAE, face inequalities in wealth and administrative laws that are set in place by centralism. In addition, women are often relegated to subordinate roles in the workplace, which ties into the effects of inequality, power imbalance, and gender disparity (Mazawi, 1999).

2.14 The Status of Women in the UAE and Women-Related Policies

Women have long faced restrictions and challenges, as reflected in the laws and regulations of many countries. Women's economic and political engagement is frequently limited because men are considered the primary providers and decision-makers. As a result, males can more easily further their education to meet their economic needs for higher degrees. The duties of Emirati women have traditionally been defined by their cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. As a result, women have been groomed to become mothers and homemakers rather than to pursue professional goals.

This position has changed drastically in recent years, and women now have greater freedom to choose their educational paths and careers. Nevertheless, despite the progress, there are still certain occupations, deemed less favorable by society, to which women tend to gravitate, such as personal services, hotel sector jobs, nursing, and hairdressing. According to the World Economic Forum, it is expected that the female employment gender gap will increase in Egypt by over 34% and by over 12% in the UAE (Kargwell, 2012).

The UAE government has made significant progress in empowering and assisting women in the workplace. According to UAE Government Portal (2022), the UAE constitution guarantees women equal pay to their male counterparts. In addition, they are guaranteed equitable access to health and social services, education, and employment opportunities. With regard to the workplace environment, companies in both the private and public sectors are not allowed to employ women for long night shifts and hazardous jobs, and they must grant them full maternity leave with full payment. Some UAE government initiatives aiming to promote gender equality include a compulsory female presence on the boards of directors for all government organizations, the formation of a Gender Balance Council, monthly financial assistance for Emirati women in need, and housing for single Emirati women (UAE Government, 2022).

However, despite these advances, other crucial aspects of women's employment still need to be addressed, such as work–life balance (WLB) and work–family conflict (WFC). According to Forster et al. (2014), over the last 30 years, these aspects have given rise to considerable debate and many published studies, but they have not been awarded sufficient focus in the MENA region. Forster et al.'s study explored how Emirati women adapt to work and family demands and how this affects their job performance and family lives. The study concluded that there are similarities in the challenges faced by Emirati and Western women in these respects, but the challenges are most apparent in the UAE private sector. However, despite the UAE government's efforts, promoting "Emiratization" in the private sector has had little success as the nationals prefer to work in the public sector. Foster et al. (2014) recommend that the private sector should implement more appealing policies to attract women, and the UAE government should follow best practices in this area, as established in other regions, such as the UK, New Zealand, and Australia.

2.15 Women in Vocational Training Institutes

The increased awareness of TVET's importance has posed questions about the huge gender disparity in vocational education. It is important to inquire whether training in vocational fields helps women achieve better prospects. TVET is supported by programs that aim to reduce poverty by training people and transitioning them into the

labor market. Therefore, it is important to promote vocational training as part of the regular educational curriculum, and measures should be taken to promote women's participation in these educational activities (Mutarubukwa & Mazana, 2017; Oviawe et al., 2017). It is important to know that globally, over 130 million children are classified as illiterate, of which 59% are females. One of the main reasons for this is that educational programs covering vocational education address only the needs of men. Women in rural areas generally face domestic restrictions and, in many cases, are unable to pursue education at all (Hartl, 2009).

2.15.1 Women in Vocational Training around the World

Under the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968, $40 million was appropriated in 1974 for vocational education research and development under the authority of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 and administered by the Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education of the U.S. Office of Education (U.S.O.E.). However, only a small portion of this multimillion-dollar financing went to projects that specifically addressed the needs of women in vocational education. In 1972, 49% of the 6.4 million women and girls enrolled in public vocational programs in the U.S were trained in home economics, while another 28% were trained in office practices (Roby, 1975).

Institutional hurdles in vocational school training for technical vocations, trades, and industry have limited women's ability to gain superior business skills. Barriers confronting women seeking vocational education were discussed by Roby (1975), who found that the major barriers were the admission procedures to vocational education courses, the courses being segregated by gender in secondary schools, the lack of requests for female enrollment in vocational education programs, child and family care, traditional teaching methods that educate women to function only at an administrative level, and weak career guidance that might have otherwise helped women to make more appropriate career choices.

Kane and Frazee (1978) conducted a survey of women in U.S vocational technical schools to investigate the factors affecting the occupational decisions and plans of women enrolled in non-traditional vocational training in secondary schools and of

women enrolled in mixed and traditional training, and to identify the problems that the female students faced in the non-traditional training. The sample included 1,062 women in non-traditional career training, 1,006 women in mixed training, and 1,002 women training in traditional careers, who came from 156 area vocational technical schools in 36 states. It also included educational employees deemed important by the non-traditional career women. The findings indicate that the students believed career education to be the most influential counseling strategy, their mothers were the most influential people to them, and interest was the main driver prompting them to choose vocational education rather than earnings, as had been assumed. One of the most significant challenges that the non-traditional career women faced was coping with men in the classroom. The most important recommendation was that some traditional career counseling procedures, such as individual testing, should be reexamined.

Women in vocational training have experienced their fair share of challenges. Separate admission criteria for women that restrict them from choosing certain majors and a lack of awareness of programs for adult women were among the top barriers. For those who were mothers, childcare and location were the major problems. In addition, the most important concern was that of men adjusting to having women in the classroom. In some cases, the instructional method used could produce female stereotypes that might hinder women's effective learning in the classroom with their male peers (Kane & Frazee, 1978).

Houser and Garvey (1985) identified differences between women who enroll in male-dominated vocational programs and those who take female-dominated vocational programs. The male-dominated programs are called "non-traditional" vocational training programs, such as auto mechanic or welder, while the female-dominated ones are called "traditional" programs, such as secretarial jobs or nursing. Four factors were examined in this study. The first was demographics or family background, such as the size of the family of origin, the parents' child-rearing practices, the mother's employment history, ethnicity, and total family income. The second factor was social support and encouragement from others. Here, the women were asked whether any family member or friend had ever encouraged them to take a class not usually taken by a woman. The third factor was peer experience of non-traditional programs: Women were asked whether any

of their female or male friends, brothers or sisters, had ever taken a course not usually taken by a member of their sex. The fourth factor was personality and sex-role orientation, which involved measuring work commitment and assessing internal factors, such as fear of success. Half of the women who participated in the study were currently enrolled in male-traditional programs, and the other half were in female-traditional programs. The study revealed that the factor that most significantly distinguished the women in non-traditional roles was the amount of support and encouragement they received from their social networks.

Female stigmatization across the TVET system affects the performance of women enrolled in these institutions (Mutarubukwa & Mazana, 2017), although the exact nature of this stigma has not been directly established. Female students are also reported to have different coping methods and tactics than their male counterparts. In a qualitative analysis conducted by Mutarubukwa and Mazana (2017), the primary features of this stigmatization were found to be discrimination by male students and teachers, harsh language from male students and teachers, and the attitudes of female students due to pre-existing stereotypes.

The factors that influence a woman's choice of profession are complicated, interconnected, and not solely economic. They are complex and interrelated, both personal and social in nature. These factors might be classified as either external to the woman, such as support from their families, friends, or teachers, or as internal to the woman, such as personality characteristics. The perception of mothers as role models may also impact women's professional decisions. Personality traits, such as locus of control, fear of success, and sex role orientation, can all influence an individual's employment choices (Houser & Garvey, 1985).

2.15.2 Women in Vocational Training in Arab Countries

In the MENA region, it is important that women's roles in the workplace are respected, and this only becomes possible when women are given their own professional spaces. This, however, poses the risk of the development of gender-based occupations, where women opt for careers in either education or medicine. The vocational training and education of women is often minimal in this region, thereby limiting women's

representation in the vocational workplace. However, in considering the bigger picture, it is possible to increase the representation of women in the Gulf States, despite social and political mechanisms that resist women's obtaining positions of authority.

In Arab countries, women are frequently disregarded in relation to higher education, including vocational training. Higher education and vocational training cover a broad range of knowledge and abilities. Women are unable to negotiate with authorities about numerous factors that impact their professional lives, making it difficult to close the gender gap in the workplace and in educational institutions. There is also a significant educational gap between rural and urban Emirati women (Mazawi, 1999).

Women who obtain an education in the MENA region tend to live in urban settings and belong to the middle and upper classes. A notable positive change in the percentage of women postsecondary graduates has been observed in the MENA states, which interestingly now indicates a gender disparity in the favor of females in education. For example, in 1996, the student gender ratio was 6.08 females to each male in the UAE, while the lowest ratio was in Kuwait, with 1.35 females for each male (Mazawi, 1999).

Women enroll in vocational programs at a lower rate than men. Low enrollment can be linked to socio-cultural and economic factors, which are particularly significant for Arab women in the Gulf States. Perceptions, ideas, lifestyles, and personal motivations all play a role in the individual's vocational choices. Women are frequently noted as having less access to vocational education, resulting in gender disparity in this field. Previous researchers have attempted to pinpoint the roots of this educational disparity between men and women, often blaming religious and cultural attitudes (Egun & Tibi, 2010).

Gender roles are important in determining and navigating women's professional choices. Women are frequently expected to perform domestic duties and act as cheap labor in the home. While cultural and religious differences form the basis for the gender divide, it is critical to educate parents about the benefits of education for both boys and girls. It is also important to hire more female teachers to promote gender equality in the workplace.

Even when women attain higher education in the Gulf Area, they are frequently faced with unequal career possibilities. This is vital to remember in relation to the higher educational achievements of women. Educational success is critical for women seeking job prospects. However, the ongoing disparity between educational achievements and workplace representation can be attributed to a number of factors. The roles of women in the workplace are evolving due to social and political developments. Cultural norms significantly impact gender equality in higher education, and in vocational education in particular. To solve the issues faced by Arab Gulf women, it is critical to analyze gender conceptions and roles (Mazawi, 1999).

Addressing Arab academics about their role as catalysts in advancing women's roles remains difficult. It is critical to provide alternative roles for women and to emphasize the economic benefits of doing so. In the United Arab Emirates, Wilkins (2002) conducted a case study involving Dubai Polytechnic, which has mixed-gender classrooms that include both females and males. The aim of this study was to explore the role of vocational education in the formulation of a national human resource development strategy and to identify the impact factors. The researchers observed that the female students, although somewhat reluctant in the beginning due to their cultural upbringing, enjoyed learning and even surpassed their male counterparts. Female graduates were highly regarded in industry, and most either gained employment upon graduation or elected to further their studies. Economic, social, cultural, and political factors greatly impact the demand for vocational education to be expanded to a higher education sector, equivalent to the university level, so that its qualifications are upgraded and can lead to potential employment opportunities for both female and male graduates (Wilkins, 2002).

Even though women's natural ability to learn and improve their skills is critical to the job market, there is still a gender gap due to impediments in society, culture, institutions, and structures, all of which contribute to gender inequality. Women's abilities and the jobs they do are sometimes devalued simply because it is women who perform them. Gender stereotypes in the workplace can impede their opportunities to learn new skills. Furthermore, due to their domestic duties, women often cannot attend labor market training, resulting in a 27% wage gap compared to men worldwide.

However, this is even more notable in the Arab countries, Northern Africa, and South Asia, where women account for more than half the labor force. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, around 34.9% and 31.8% of women work as contributing family members, while 42.5% and 47.7% are self-employed, respectively. Self-employment is ideal for women, especially given the scarcity of part-time positions or jobs with flexible hours. However, in low- and middle-income nations, men are 75% likelier than women to start businesses (Chinen et al., 2017).

Harkat et al. (2016), using a time series analysis and regression, investigated the impact of academic performance and macroeconomic factors on student choice concerning general education and vocational education, considering both youth and women. Regarding the macroeconomic variables, the study results show that unemployment impacts the enrollment ratio between vocational and general education in Algeria, Jordan, and the UAE, and imply that unemployment is the main driving force to join vocational training. With the notable exception of Jordan and Qatar, GDP per capita appears to impact Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, and Tunisia, creating a positive movement in all those nations toward vocational training enrollment. In the UAE, GDP per capita has a negative effect, meaning that a 1% gain in growth results in a 0.1% drop in vocational training enrollment. Furthermore, while school dropout is considerable in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Syria, only in Egypt is there a positive coefficient, indicating that some of those who drop out then engage in vocational training.

2.16 Summary

This chapter has considered all aspects of vocational education and training, both in the world and, more specifically, in the UAE context. It began with a theoretical framework selected by the researcher to set the parameters for the whole chapter, namely human capital theory, and considered how this relates to the field of vocational education and training and to gender equality, which is at the heart of this study. As vocational education has had a unique history, it was important to track its evolution and progress, both across the world and also in the UAE, to show how education in general, and vocational education in particular, has developed over the years. The findings of previous studies that considered factors affecting enrollment and completion in

vocational education were presented. Topics that attracted much discussion and debate involved the mismatch between skills and education and how vocational education could be the solution to this challenge. Finally, light was shed on women's status in vocational education and training around the world and in the MENA region and the UAE in particular.

The following chapter explains the research methodology, research design, and data analysis tools employed in this study. It also sheds light on the researcher's background, the participants sampled, and the research site.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study's research process. As stated earlier, this study examined participants' (students and staff) perceptions about the external and internal factors affecting female enrollment at vocational training and educational institutes. As a result, the chapter begins by delving into the study's research paradigm, selected research design, methods, data collection, procedures, and instruments. The researcher then clarifies ethical considerations, including the survey instrument's reliability and validity. The study's results will add to the limited knowledge base in this area.

Considering that this study aimed to examine participants' perceptions about the external and internal factors affecting female enrollment at vocational training and educational institutes, the researcher formulated three research questions:

1. What are the significant internal factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to the participants?
2. What are the significant external factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to the participants?
3. How can female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE be increased, according to the participants?

3.2 The Researcher

The researcher has worked in the educational field for approximately 19 years, 11 of which in the vocational education and training sector in the student services department. The researcher worked in the same environment where the study was conducted and had a close relationship with the administrative and academic staff, as well as direct access to students and their data. In conducting the study, the researcher kept an open mind to the participants' multiple perspectives and realities, i.e., she attempted to bracket her experience and suspend all judgments and preconceived notions about the topic. This did not mean that she took herself completely out of the study, but rather that she identified her personal experiences and set them aside to gain a fresh

perspective on the topic and concentrate on the participants' lived experiences. She also explained to the students' interviewed that this research was carried by herself as a student of the UAEU and that her role now is as a researcher which means the findings of this study would be considered by decision makers to improve students' experiences and the quality of the service provided by the institute under study.

3.3 Research Paradigm and the Phenomenological Approach

It is necessary to clarify the underlying philosophical assumptions and research paradigm that guided the researcher throughout the research process and its different phases, beginning with choosing a topic, then forming the research questions, and finally selecting the study's methodology and instruments. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) illustrated the relationship between qualitative research phases, as shown below in Table 8.

Table 8: The Research Phase

Phase 1: The Researcher as a Multicultural Subject	Historical method
History and research traditions	Action and applied research
Conceptions of self and the other	Clinical research
The ethics and politics of research	*Phase 4: Methods of Collection and Analysis*
Phase 2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives	Interviewing
Positivism, postpositivism	Observing
Interpretivism, constructivism, hermeneutics	Artifacts, documents, and records
Feminism(s)	Visual methods
Racialized discourses	Autoethnography
Critical theory and Marxist models	Data management methods
Cultural studies models	Computer-assisted analysis
Queer theory	Textual analysis
Post-colonialism	Focus groups
Phase 3: Research Strategies	Applied ethnography
Design	*Phase 5: The Art, Practices, and Politics of Interpretation and Evaluation*
Case study	Criteria for judging adequacy
Ethnography, participant observation, performance ethnography	Practices and politics of interpretation
Phenomenology, ethnomethodology	Writing as interpretation
Grounded theory	Policy analysis
Life history, ***testimonio***	Evaluation traditions
	Applied research

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008)

In this study, the five phases below were chosen to guide the research process:

Phase 1: The researcher as a multicultural subject: conceptions of self and the other

Phase 2: Theoretical paradigm: social constructivism

Phase 3: Research Strategies: phenomenology

Phase 4: Methods of collecting and analysis: interviewing

Phase 5: Practice of interpretation: writing as interpretation

A *research paradigm* is "a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (Guba, 1990). The research paradigm is molded based on the four philosophical assumptions: ontological; epistemological; axiological; and methodological. These philosophical assumptions are reflected in the researcher's practice in obtaining different perspectives from female students who either were continuing their studies, dropped out, or graduated at the time when they were interviewed, as well as from administrative and teaching staff from different departments. This is just one example of several practices employed in this research.

The aforementioned philosophical assumptions are demonstrated in researcher practice and are viewed as key in the research process. Accordingly, the researcher logically adopted an underlying research paradigm based on the topic and methodology selected. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) noted that several interpretive frameworks, i.e., research paradigms, can be used, e.g., positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, hermeneutics, feminism, etc. Clearly, this study employed social constructivism as its underlying research paradigm.

Social constructivism is based on this statement: "Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views, rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

This social constructivism framework heavily reflected the researcher's approach in many ways. First, its early start already was clarified in the researcher's choice of the topic and the qualitative research design. Emerging from the researcher's belief that reality is subjective, multiple interviews were conducted with students and staff who work in the same environment to understand their subjective interpretations of their lived experiences, leading the researcher to look for different and complex views formed by interactions with others, while considering their historical and cultural norms. This is reflected in the researcher's interviews with various participants as she tried as much as possible to ask open-ended questions and give participants space to talk freely without interruptions or much guidance.

Due to the dearth of literature and knowledge related to the research topic, a qualitative research design was chosen for this study because of its emergent characteristics in opening the door to exploration, providing an in-depth and detailed examination of the issue at hand, and empowering silent voices.

Conducting phenomenological research requires questioning how we experience the world and attempting to understand the world in which we live. Based on the idea that to know the world is to be in the world profoundly, the act of researching or questioning is an intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world to become a larger part of it, or even to become the world. In line with this philosophy, the research becomes an act of care as we are keen to know the world in the eyes of those we care about and gain a deep understanding of their insightful descriptions of their everyday experiences. While it is important to know what phenomenology is, it is also crucial to know what it is not: It does not describe facts, cannot be used to prove something, and is not universal or singular, e.g., it cannot be used to solve problems (Van Manen, 2016).

The phenomenological approach fit the research topic because it helped the researcher conduct a comprehensive examination of the factors affecting female enrollment rates in vocational training through the participants' stories and perspectives, and the meanings they hold. Thus, the researcher was able to identify the factors involved in low enrollment rates and examine them from multiple perspectives.

The researcher considered the situations of female students choosing the vocational path or withdrawing from it as the phenomena to be studied to describe the common meanings of these events in these individuals' lived experiences. The phenomenological methodology considers both the subjective perceptions of the individuals under study and their objective perceptions compared with other groups in which this approach lies between the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Of the two types of phenomenological research (hermeneutic and transcendental/epistemological), the researcher selected the transcendental path, as it suited the researcher's intention to bracket (or *epoché*) preconceived notions and provide a fresh perspective on the topic under study. Husserl (1977) imported the term *epoché*, i.e., to be free of bias and prejudgments. According to this concept, the researcher should put aside their preconceived notions. This does not mean that we should doubt everything, but rather that we should keep an open mind and gaze at things freshly and naively. Transcendental phenomenology is the path to universal self-knowledge, as it emerges from the pure ego. Phenomenology is the first method of knowledge because it begins with "things themselves" as it attempts to remove all prejudgments and presuppositions, leading to a transcendental mindset that is fresh and open, i.e., not influenced by customs and beliefs of normal science (Husserl, 1977, as cited in Moustakas, 1994).

3.4 Research Design

There are two options for research design: one-way communication or two-way communication. The one-way method is linear and involves one or a fixed response (e.g., yes-or-no questions), while the two-way method involves more than one response (Fellows & Liu, 2021). In the one-way method, no interaction occurs, e.g., giving and receiving feedback and checking if the participants conveyed their intended meaning, but the two-way method can transfer meaning better (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981). The one-way technique is typically quantitative, whereas the two-way method is typically qualitative. Both methods have pros and cons, but both can help researchers reach various study goals.

Method selection is sometimes straightforward, depending on the research problem and research question, but the boundaries in the application of some approaches

are not always so clear. As a result, the researcher should ensure that the method chosen is the best fit for a given research topic, or at the very least avoid "gross misfit" (Yin, 2003). Figure 8 below illustrates various analytical paths.

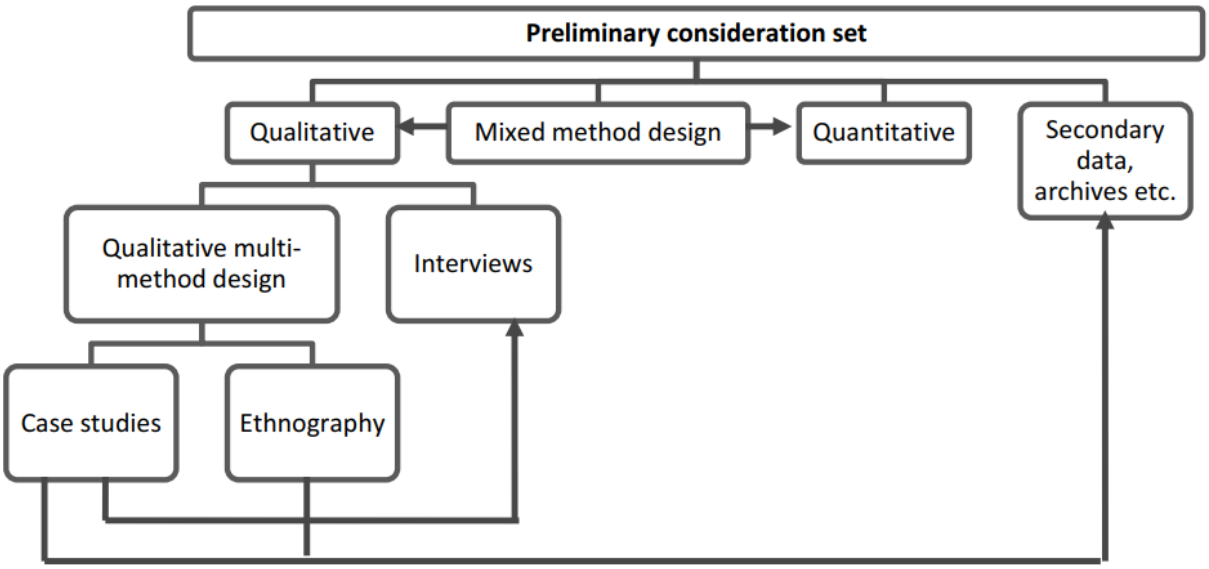

Figure 8: Paths of Possible Choices in a Preliminary Consideration Set (Stysko-Kunkowska, 2014)

3.4.1 Qualitative Method

This study utilized a qualitative method to collect the data and answer the research questions. A qualitative approach is more in-depth, less constraining, and more informative than a quantitative method. It also is used to determine an individual' or group'' perspectives, beliefs, and comprehension, among other qualities (Patton, 2014). Furthermore, the data comprise words, not numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Fellows and Liu (2021) defined *qualitative research* this way: "(A) qualitative approach seeks to find out why things happen as they do to determine the meaning which people attribute to events, processes, and structures." Qualitative data, which are grouped into occurrences or stories, have a concrete, vivid, and meaningful flavor that typically is more persuasive to a reader (Milles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research seeks deep insights that can be obtained only by speaking with people firsthand about a problem.

The qualitative research approach is suitable for answering the "whys" and "whats" of human behavior - e.g., opinions, attitudes, and experiences (Guest et al., 2013) - which are the primary focus of this study. The qualitative research method is

mostly descriptive in nature and focuses on procedures that include understanding and explaining dynamics.

With the qualitative research approach, predetermined classifications do not constrain fieldwork, but rather contribute significantly to the depth, openness, and details of qualitative inquiry, something that all researchers seek (Patton, 2014). *Inductive research* does not begin with a set of hypotheses or a purpose to test models, but rather employs inductive analysis of the obtained data to investigate themes and interrelationships in the phenomena studied. As a result, qualitative research allows for a more holistic perspective because it can take on a whole phenomenon under study through triangulation of diverse perspectives, allowing for a thorough evaluation of the topic in question (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Below are qualitative methods' key advantages, according to Malhotra and Birks (2000):

1. They can be used to investigate complex phenomena by describing what is difficult to explain using structured questions.
2. They provide a holistic dimension to provide a thorough and all-encompassing view of the phenomenon being studied.
3. They boost awareness and comprehension of people'' perspectives and the mechanisms and outcomes of phenomena.
4. They allow for sensitive reasoning to perceive beliefs and feelings, styles, attitudes, and behaviors that are unconscious, implicit, and difficult to articulate.
5. They can be used to research unexplained phenomena effectively.
6. They can be used to create new theories.
7. They can provide validation and completion of a pre-existing hypothesis.
8. In the context of procedure, qualitive research applies supporting strategies that allow for a deeper understanding of people'' ideas, feelings, and behaviors, as well as explain differences.

However, qualitative methods also come with some limitations, according to Stysko-Kunkowska (2014):

1. They do not follow a positivist, quantitative approach.

2. Concerns exist regarding the “quantitative” quality of such research.
3. Their results cannot be extrapolated statistically to the entire population.
4. Economists and managers have not acknowledged them universally as being a valid research method.
5. Their results often are difficult to report concisely.
6. Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data can be time-consuming.

3.4.2 Interviews as a Qualitative Method

Under the qualitative research method, the interview is the best choice for achieving the research goal and answering the research questions. Before describing the interview question and the method used in analysis, it is necessary to describe the interview as a data collection method.

Interviews may be the only method used in a case study, part of a multi-method design (e.g., as a case study or ethnographical method), or part of a mixed-design approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, as shown in Figure 8 above. Compared with other qualitative methods, e.g., observation, interviews are more convenient, accessible, and economical.

Many types of interviews can be used, according to Fontana and Frey (1994), including the following:

1. Focused interviews
2. Unstructured interviews
3. Non-directive interviews
4. Open-ended interviews
5. Active interviews
6. Semi-structured interviews.

Interviews can be conducted between the interviewer and groups of respondents or one-on-one. Also, they can be conducted face to face, via phone, or online, e.g., emails, zoom meetings, Microsoft teams and faxes. Figure 9 illustrates the classification of interviews according to Stysko-Kunkowska (2014). Some elements should be considered when choosing interviews as a data collection method. These elements

include the site of the interview, time, number of participants (in the case of group interviews), and the interview's structure (arrangement of the question).

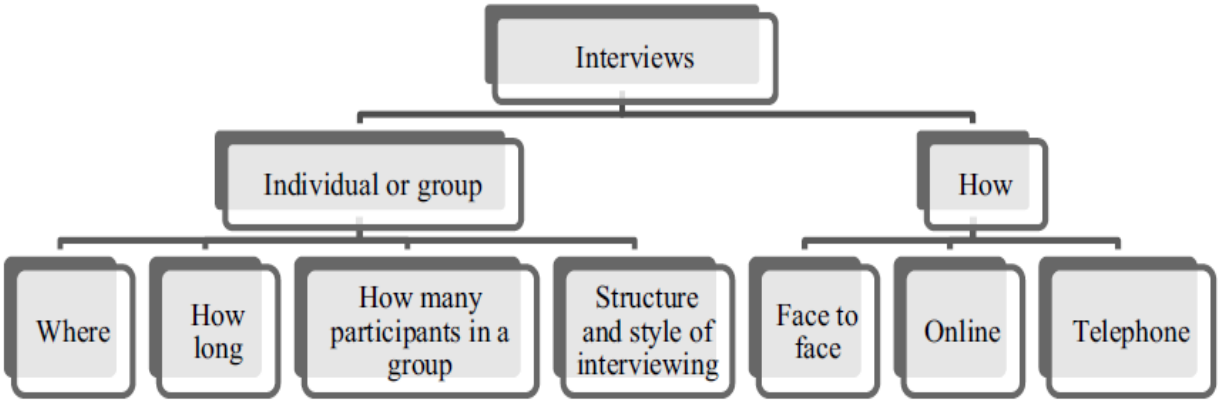

Figure 9: The Classification of Interviews
(Stysko-Kunkowska, 2014)

According to Fontana and Frey (1994), the interviewer must have the following necessary skills to maximize the interview data's validity and reliability:

1. Well-versed in the topic under discussion
2. Able to listen to respondents' answers and remain silent
3. Able to get respondents to expand on their answers and provide more detailed explanations when necessary
4. Able to remain on topic during discussions with respondents and not deviate from it, which can generate confusion and waste time.

3.4.3 Interview as a Selected Method

This study used semi-structured interviews with key questions to help define the unknowns that needed to be explored further. One person performed one-on-one interviews with students, administrative workers, and teachers. Because of the nature of semi-structured interviews, they can be scheduled in advance at any time and location. The interviewer can probe respondents freely to broaden the original chain of questions in a conversational manner during semi-structured interviews, which may run anywhere from 40 minutes to a few hours (Hancock et al., 2009). Because they had a lot to say and some perspectives that merited additional exploration, the interviewer had to interview with several participants more than once.

The interviewer began each interview with general pre-determined questions about each participant's background, followed by more intensive questions to gain more depth into participants' views and perspectives.

The preliminary questions for the students were:

- ✓ Tell me about yourself.
- ✓ Why did you join/leave the institute, and how did you find out about it/other institutes?
- ✓ Were you studying at another educational institute before coming here?
- ✓ Do you have relatives or friends who are studying either here or elsewhere? What do you think of their experiences?

The preliminary questions for the administrative staff and teachers were:

- ✓ Have you worked for other organizations before coming here, or is this your first job experience?
- ✓ What was your major at the university you attended?

The study's goal was to examine the factors that lead to decreases in female enrollment. These factors were categorized into internal and external factors. Three main questions were related to internal factors for students, and different sub questions were asked to examine other variables and issues. The same method was applied to external factors. Table 9 summarizes the interview questions that students answered (see Appendix A).

Table 9: Interview Questions for the Students

Research question	Main question in interview	More detailed question
What are the significant internal factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to the students?	✓ What does it feel like to study on campus? ✓ What do you think about your learning experience on campus? ✓ Describe your experiences with your teachers/student services staff/ administrative staff.	✓ How do you feel when you return to study after a two-year absence? ✓ Talk about a happy or negative experience at school that affected your future study decisions ✓ Talk about an experience you have had on campus (particular experience)
What are the significant external factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to the students?	✓ Is the institute near your residence? ✓ How was your academic performance in school? ✓ What are your plans after you finish your studies here?	✓ How do you balance your study and family lives? ✓ What types of experiences impact your decisions (e.g., peer pressure)? ✓ Has geographical location impacted your enrollment or withdrawal? ✓ Do you have specific goals or know the purpose of studying for a vocational diploma?

Table 10 summarizes the interview questions that staff answered (see Appendix B). Three main questions were used to investigate the significant internal factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE. Furthermore, four main questions were used to investigate significant external factors.

Table 10: Interview Questions for Administrative Staff and Teachers

Research question	Main question in interview	More detailed question
What are the significant internal factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to administrative staff and teachers?	✓ How do you think students feel about their overall experience at the institute? ✓ What do you think students' learning experience on campus is like? ✓ What do you think about students' relationships with their teachers, student services staff, and administration staff?	✓ How do your perspectives at vocational training institutes affect your communication styles and your level of understanding these types of students?
What are the significant external factors that impact female enrollment at vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to administrative staff and teachers?	✓ How do you think applicants find out about the institute? ✓ How would you describe applicants' academic performance? Do you think that this affects how they choose an educational institute? ✓ What do you think affects their education choices? ✓ Do you think that these students will have a secure career in the future? Why?	✓ How have previous learning experiences impacted how you view learning and learners? ✓ How has your communication with applicants and the community affected your knowledge about students' academic performance?

3.5 Participant Sample

Qualitative research necessitates purposeful participant selection, which is necessary because only those chosen can provide insight into the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Depending on the research objectives, aim, and available resources, the sampling of interviewees/research subjects must be homogeneous, with some particularly important similarities (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Approximately 350 potential participants who were enrolled at one of the vocational training education and educational training institutes in the UAE were invited to participate. The invitation for the interview was sent to potential participants and included a summary of the study's goals and objectives, as well as information about the study's participation requirements, time commitment, and data collection methods.

The personal and study information on students was retrieved from their reports in the educational training institute. The reports contained the information below:

- ✓ Student information (student ID, gender, name, date of birth, email, Emirates ID, phone number.
- ✓ Current term course registration.
- ✓ Graduation status.
- ✓ Student attendance.
- ✓ Student grade history.
- ✓ Student IELTS and CEPA English overall score results.

In any qualitative study, a minimum sample size is not required and mostly is determined by the study's aims and what seems beneficial and credible within the time and resources available. Sample sizes in qualitative research can be rather small. The interviewer conducts interviews until the data no longer generate new findings (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Because of the limited time and resources available, only experts who responded positively were accepted as respondents for this study.

The nonprobability purposive heterogeneous sample was drawn from a population comprising staff working at the vocational and educational institute and students either currently studying there or who have dropped out or graduated. The staff participants' experience ranged between 8 and 11 years working full-time at the institute. A mixture of male and female staff from the administrative and academic departments was chosen, though only female Emirati students were selected, including current students, dropouts, and graduates. The interviewees were contacted directly and engaged in one-on-one interviews. The participating students' demographics were retrieved from the system before conducting the interviews. An informed consent form was distributed for participants to sign. Altogether, six current students, three withdrawn students, three

graduates from the diploma program but withdrawn from the advanced diploma program, one graduate and student who failed due to her absences were interviewed. Furthermore, 10 of the institute's staff were interviewed to gain their perspectives. Thus, the sample contained at least 24, depending on saturation. As several themes and perspectives started to repeat themselves once there were 20 participants, the researcher in this study estimated that saturation had been reached. However, she opted to conduct four additional interviews before coming to the conclusion that saturation had been reached. The process of selecting the student sample aimed to ensure diversity in participants' demographics and other variables.

These diversity factors are provided in Table 11:

1. Age range (22–47 years).
2. Single and married students.
3. Residence area (in proximity to the institute).
4. Student status (e.g., current active, withdrawn, graduate, diploma graduate student who have withdrawn from the advanced diploma program, and those who failed due to excessive absences).
5. Secondary school stream (literary or science)
6. Major of study (mechanical engineering (ETM); accounting (ACT); environmental, health, and safety (EHS); or technical laboratory analysis (TLA)

The participants were asked about other differences during the interviews, e.g., their relationships with teachers and administrative staff, the subjects that they like, reasons for dropping out, etc.).

Table 11: Demographics and other Information on Students

St. Code	Age	Social Status	Student Status	Prog.	Qual.	Sec. School Stream	Sec. School GPA	Prev. Enrol.
C1	24	Married	Current	ETM	DP	Literary	83.6	UAEU
C2	28	Married	Current	TLA	DP	Science	83.2	UAEU
C3	37	Married	Current	EHS	DP	Science	61.1	Non
C4	22	Single	Current	EHS	DP	Literary	69.8	HCT
C5	35	Single	Current	ACT	AD	Literary	61.2	HCT
C6	47	Married	Current	EHS	DP	Literary	77.9	Non
WD1	23	Single	WD 201830	EHS	CR	Literary	81.2	Non
WD2	26	Single	WD 201830	Level 3	FP	Literary	89.5	Non
WD3	23	Single	WD 201930	Level 3	FP	Literary	74.5	HCT
WG1	30	Single	WG 201910	ACT	AD	Literary	70.3	ADU
WG2	25	Married	WG 201930	EHS	AD	Literary	82.8	UAEU
WG3	27	Single	WG 201910	ACT	DP	Literary	66.6	HCT
G1	31	Single	G 202030	RET	DP	Literary	93.4	UAEU
FA1	27	Single	FA 201820	Level 2	FP	Literary	67.3	FCHS

One academic manager and two head teachers were interviewed:

1. Academic manager (AM) with a Ph.D. in engineering and more than 20 years of experience in the educational field in the UAE and 10 years of experience outside the UAE.
2. Business department head teacher (H1) with a master's in business administration (MBA) in marketing and human resources (HR), and 17 years of experience in the education field.
3. EHS and TLA head teacher (H2) with a bachelor's degree in HR and business, and a master's degree in business administration with around 15 years of teaching experience. Currently, he is studying for a Ph.D. in HR.

Furthermore, three administrative staff were interviewed:

1. Administrative staff (A1) with a bachelor's degree in management information systems (MIS) and a master's degree in business administration, and about 15 years of experience in the education field.
2. Administrative staff (A2) with a diploma degree and having about 22 years of experience in education. She worked as a class teacher before becoming an administrator at a public vocational training institute.

3. Administrative staff (A3) with a bachelor's degree in applied psychology and 12 years of experience in the education field.

In addition, four instructors were interviewed:

1. English foundation program female instructor.
2. English foundation program male instructor.
3. Environmental, health and safety male instructor.
4. Business administration male instructor.

3.6 Data Collection

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed manually into text form to verify that no data were lost while attaining familiarity with the data based on past knowledge, a technique known as an interpretative process. The transcription method involved a thorough review of data via repeated listening, which can take one to two hours or more depending on the depth of probing and questions and answers within the recorded sessions.

While conducting the interviews, the following criteria were used:

- ✓ The phenomenological interview questions were broad and open, encouraging participants to express their views (Giorgi, 1997).
- ✓ The questions were asked in the participants' native language to gain more access to their perspectives. It also was necessary to listen actively to identify areas that needed more clarification and, therefore, further probing (Benner, 1994).
- ✓ The researcher may have needed to interview a participant more than once for purposes of contextualizing experiences, thereby better comprehending the phenomenon.

Table 12 illustrates the phenomenological interviewing structure. The key concepts focused on were description, natural attitude, lifeworld, modes of appearing, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation.

Table 12: The Structure of Phenomenological Interviewing

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	"Tell me about becoming ill," or "Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit."
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue With Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	"Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit,"or "Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis."
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	"Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times."

(Bevan, 2014)

Participants scheduled interviews at a time and place that were most convenient for them. As was mentioned, interviews lasted an hour or more, depending on the length of the conversations between the researcher and participants. The interviewer gave participants latitude to express their views even if they seemed irrelevant to the questions. The participants provided verbal and written consent for the interviews before they were conducted.

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and UAE University granted permission to conduct the study, the researcher obtained the participants' consent before scheduling the interviews. The researcher conducted the interviews in a private room and began by stating the study's purpose. The researcher had the latitude to add more interview questions when deemed necessary.

3.7 Data Analysis

This section outlines the analytical method employed in this study. Merriam (1998) stated that data analysis should include both inductive and deductive reasoning and should be presented on many analytical levels. For these reasons, qualitative analysis is difficult and necessitates proper processing and classification of respondents' responses.

In my study, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide as a foundation for conducting thematic analysis, comprising six phases:

1. Familiarize yourself with your data: Read and reread the data, identify patterns and meaning, and take notes, highlighting initial ideas. In this study, I have interviewed students in particular in their native language (Arabic) so I had to transcribe them and then translate them from Arabic to English.
2. Generate initial codes: The Nvivo program was used by the researcher as she pasted all interviews and divided them into students', staff and teachers' sections. Code the data into meaningful and manageable chunks of text—e.g., sections, quotations, and single phrases—and gather data related to each code.
3. Search for themes: Organize codes into initial themes and collect important data for each theme.
4. Review themes: Using a two-level analysis of the codes, refine the draft themes identified in Phase 3. The first level entails reading over each theme's codes to determine whether a consistent pattern emerges. I proceeded to the second level of analysis if a cohesive pattern was found. If codes did not fit, I had to figure out whether the theme itself was the problem or the codes and information for that specific subject. To complete the second-level analysis, I went over the whole data set to ensure that the themes were consistent with the data. This also allowed me to determine whether any additional data needed to be coded.
5. Define and name themes: Define each theme and determine its essence, including which part of the data and research questions apply to it.
6. Produce the report: Analyze the data and produce a narrative about it that goes beyond a presentation, making an argument in regard to the research questions. This results in a clear, concise, logical, non-repetitive, and engaging description of the data's story within and across themes.

In conclusion, the researcher begins the data analysis by describing her personal experience in the education field, specifically in the vocational training and education context. This step is necessary to bracket her experiences and set them aside so that they will not affect her judgment. The next steps involve listing significant statements that participants reported, while avoiding repetitive statements, then grouping these

statements into larger “meaning units” and describing in writing what the participants experienced, including some significant quotes, and how they experienced phenomena. Finally, the researcher writes a coherent description that includes all these aspects (Creswell, 2013). All interview transcriptions were pasted into sections in Nvivo and then themes and subthemes were derived and organized accordingly (codes).

3.8 Trustworthiness

The essential qualities of trustworthiness in qualitative research help distinguish between solid and poorly conducted research. To assess properly whether a qualitative study fulfills rigorous standards, think of qualitative investigations in terms of building trustworthiness and representational accuracy or transferability. In order to determine whether a qualitative study is trustworthy, one must examine its internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. These requirements are developed from the self-evaluation questions qualitative researchers should be asking themselves on "truth value," "applicability," "consistency," and "neutrality” (Guba, 1981).

The research findings’ consistency and their reproducibility by other researchers are referred to as reliability. Validity relates to the method’s accuracy or investigative competence, as well as its suitability for the investigated topic. Qualitative studies are subjective because of the wide range of interpretations by researchers, resulting in skewed results. Thus, it is critical that researchers and scientists obtain the tools they need to determine which studies and findings are reliable (Brink, 1993).

Several actions were taken to ensure that this study was trustworthy. First, the interview questions were open-ended to avoid predetermined responses. To ensure that the interview questions were formulated accurately, the interview session was taped to prevent data loss, and the interview sessions were organized by specifying time, date, place, and transcript to reduce confusion (Patton, 2014).

Four aspects should be considered in establishing trustworthiness in the study, according to Guba (1981): credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability. I enlisted a group of peers, colleagues, and some students to help in establishing credibility by requesting them to read the questions and inform me if the questions were

not clear or needed more refinement. Participants also were allowed to look over their transcripts and add more information and perspectives, ensuring that I conveyed their entire narratives and unique experiences.

It was critical to remember that a student's experiences cannot be generalized to the entire population to ensure transferability, but there may be some transferability because the participants were chosen carefully. The participants shared several commonalities, e.g., only Emirati female students were chosen to be interviewed.

Dependability refers to data stability. To ensure it, I kept the interview's general framework the same with each participant during data collection to guarantee consistency, although the process and line of questioning may have differed based on the dialogue with the individual. The term confirmability refers to how data are interpreted. I also presented a detailed map of data interpretation and was honest about my biases and assumptions.

In conclusion, as the study was based on transcendental phenomenology, the only source of validation in the interview transcripts was the participants themselves. As noted above, they were able to view their interview transcripts to provide further clarifications and insights. Prolonged engagement already has been satisfied because the researcher worked for eight years at the institute and gained staff and students' trust. Peers (professional colleagues) helped review the data analysis and identify any researcher biases. In terms of external auditing, a faculty member from the Foundation of Education Department was asked to judge the validation of the data analysis process and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.9 Limitations of the Study

This study has potential limitations related to its theoretical framework, data access, interview tools used, and limited previous studies on the topic within the UAE context. Although one of the main theoretical frameworks used, human capital theory, is a solid one that provides the study with strong infrastructure, as with any other theory, some inherent limitations have been attributed to it. According to Marginson (2019), human capital theory has some methodological imperfections, as it uses a single

universal theoretical lens, thereby ignoring multiple truths, and a closed system model, among other defects. Marginson (2019) added that it fails to clarify certain aspects, e.g., how education could increase productivity, the reasons behind uneven wages, how education increases productivity, and why wages have become more uneven. These criticisms are blessings, nonetheless, as they open the door to creating more effective educational models that could explain these blurred areas.

This study was conducted in one of the UAE cities in one of its public vocational training institutes. Access to other branches of the institute was limited due to COVID-19 pandemic, and this also applied to accessing students' data in the system, which was restricted. Furthermore, because of time constraints, it was more practical to interview staff and students at Al Ain rather than at other branches. Access to other branches of the institute was limited due to COVID-19 pandemic, and this also applied to accessing students' data in the system, which was restricted. Furthermore, because of time constraints, it was more practical to interview staff and students at Al Ain rather than at other branches.

The interviews were conducted via MS Teams and not in person due to online learning mandates implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and regulations. No one denies that face-to-face interaction provides more visual cues, as the researcher can observe participants' body language and anticipate when they need reassurance or more time and space to talk, and when to listen and wait for their responses. To compensate for this deficit in conditions, the researcher gave the participants more time to answer questions and scheduled more sessions to clarify vague points. Internet connectivity was another issue, as some participants had weak Internet connections; therefore, with these participants, phone interviews were used instead of MS Teams.

Another aforementioned limitation was the dearth of literature reviews on national female students regarding factors impacting their choice of enrollment at vocational training institutes in general and in the UAE in particular. This could be attributed to the topic's uniqueness and specificity, as it focused only on Emirati females in vocational training in the UAE.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This study has provided rich insight into the essence of the lived experiences of both students and staff in one of the UAE's vocational training and education institutes. The purpose of this study is to explore the internal and external factors impacting female students. Its theoretical framework is based on the human capital and gender equity theoretical framework in addition to the social constructivism paradigm as the basis for interpreting data collected from interviews to explain the mentioned factors. This chapter provides the results of the data collection and analysis and captures the findings from the participants' points of view. The overall findings provide answers to the main questions of the study, which are:

1. What are the significant internal factors that impact female enrollment in vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to the participants?
2. What are the significant external factors that impact female enrollment in vocational education and training institutes in the UAE, according to the participants?
3. How can female enrollment in vocational education and training institutes in the UAE be increased, according to the participants?

Semi-structured interviews with both the students and the staff yielded the themes identified in Figure 10.

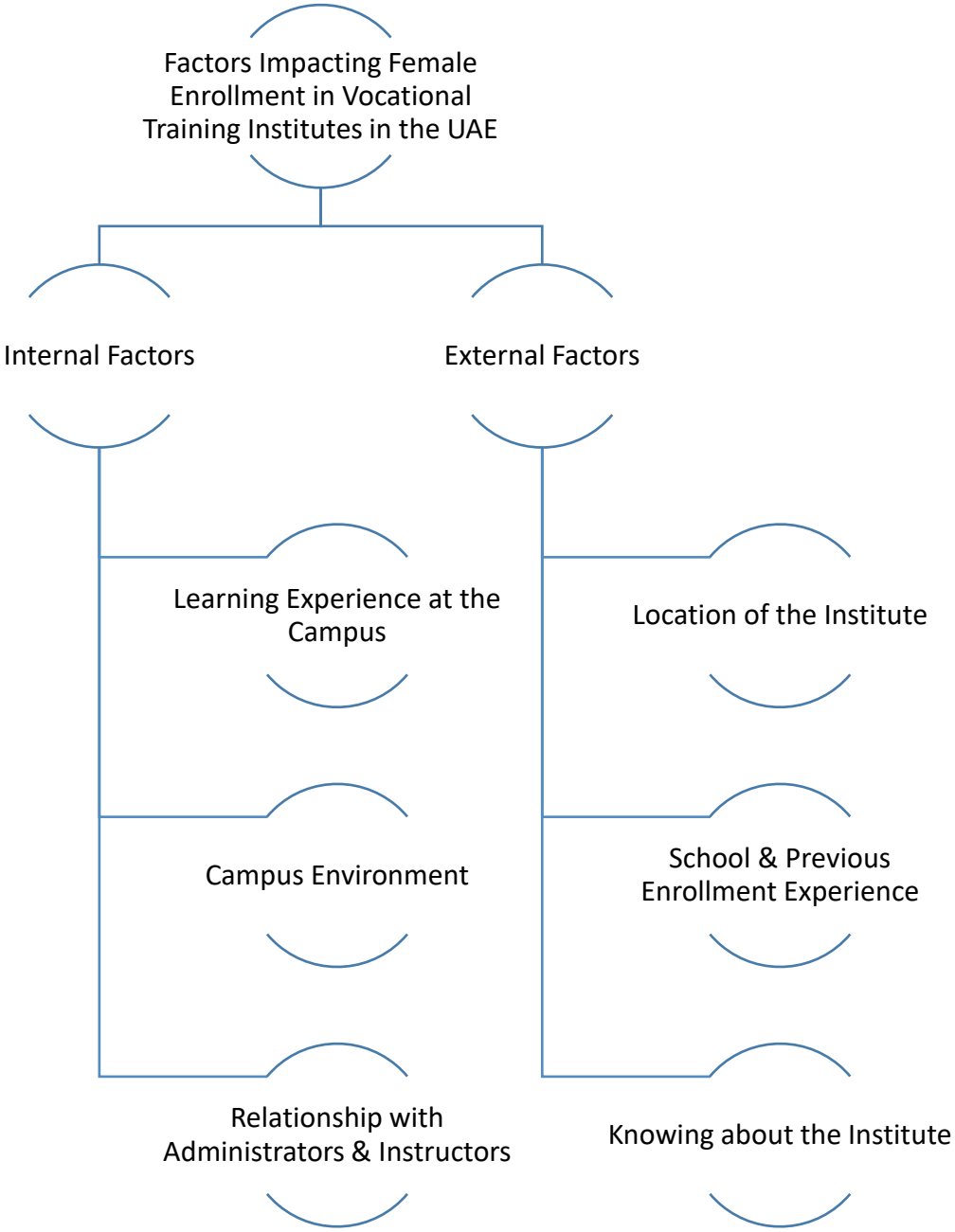

Figure 10: Theme Categories

For the purpose of clarification, it should be explained that the researcher used the following registered abbreviations or specific codes commonly used in the data system: C = current student at the time of interview, AS = active student at the time of interview (same meaning as current student), WD = student who had withdrawn at the time of interview, WG = student who had graduated with a diploma but withdrawn from an advanced diploma course at the time of interview, G: graduate from the institute, and FA = student who had failed due to poor attendance at the time of interview. A total of 14

female students, including five current students, five who had female students, and five students who had graduated from a governmental vocational training institute, were interviewed.

In terms of the administrative and teaching staff, the researcher conducted interviews with a total of 10 staff, including one academic manager (AM), two head teachers (H1, H2), three administrative staff (A1, A2, A3), and four foundation program and vocational instructors/teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4).

4.2 Research Setting

The researcher conducted the study in of the UAE's cities. The institute has around 70 staff and around 900 female and male students at the time of the interviews. Current students, graduates, withdrawn students, and those who had failed due to excessive unaccepted absences were from previous terms were chosen. Its initial aim was to provide CAA-accredited academic diplomas for training in medical care and services, fashion design, IT, and IT services. It has subsequently evolved and transformed into a vocational training and education institute that offers NQA-accredited vocational diplomas in mechanical, electrical, and electronic engineering, technical laboratory analytics, environmental health and safety, tourism, accounting, and business. The number of students in the institute has increased from 400 at the early start of its operation to 900 female and male students at the time of this study, encompassing both fresh and old grade-12 graduates at recent terms due the management's emphasis on increasing enrollment rates.

According to its website, the institute's vision is "to empower Emiratis with the competencies needed to contribute to the nation's future development through workplace-focused, lifelong technical and vocational education and training," and its mission is "to be the benchmark of technical and vocational education and training in the UAE" (Adveti, 2016).

4.3 Results for Q1: The Significant Internal Factors that Impact Female Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE

4.3.1 Learning Experience at the Campus

C1 (a 23-year-old single student in her graduate term in the EHS diploma program) began by narrating the experiences of her cousin, who used to study at the institute. She was the one who had told C1 about the institute and warned her about it having limited majors. C1's sister, who had just started studying online at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, had begun with the foundation course and received her EmSAT before registering for the EHS major. She would have preferred it if there had been more majors to choose from. She recalled that she had been encouraged by her friends and even the AM to complete her studies and select a suitable major to specialize in, which was engineering.

C2 (a 37-year-old single student in the EHS diploma program) was delighted to be a student in the TLA program because it involved scientific subjects such as physics and chemistry, and she had received excellent grades in those subjects due to her commitment and regular attendance. She proudly recounted that her intake was the first to complete the TLA certificate, and they had to wait for other intakes to enable the management to open up the advanced diploma program for them. C2 only postponed the training module because she was pregnant and could not fully focus on her training, which was at Abu Dhabi Sewerage Service Company in Al Ain. With regard to her online learning experience, she expressed that she preferred attending classes physically, rather than following them online, because online attendance made students "exhausted" and "lazy." She also revealed that she had not been able to understand anything at the beginning of her online classes, but her teachers helped her to understand more.

C3 (a 37-year-old married student in the EHS diploma program) described her online learning experience as "messed up." It had caused her a lot of stress because her children were at school, and they had online classes at the same time. She had to follow up with them and make sure they attended and participated, which had been very difficult. She said that children were better off physically attending school because they had barely learned anything at home. With regard to attendance, she said that she only

attended classes for the sake of attendance and not to learn. It seemed that because of her family responsibilities, she did not intend to further her studies, as her job was her priority.

She also expressed that she felt that the institute's system was similar to "the school system." She was not satisfied with the schedule being the same for all students nor with the design of the building and classrooms being similar to those of schools and unlike those of other colleges and universities. When she first registered, she had expected only to attend during class times and that the schedule would be flexible. In terms of the teaching process, she said that some of the subjects were taught very well, although some were not. She also expressed her desire to repeat the first aid course, since it could have been taught in a better way. She suggested bringing in a specialized assistant to support teaching this subject.

As mentioned already, C4 (a 22-year-old single student in the EHS diploma program) learned about the institute from her cousins, who had had a positive experience there and praised the institute for its encouraging learning environment. She had not stopped or withdraw from classes at any time since joining the institute. She encouraged girls to study at the institute: "I wish that all girls who have not found anywhere to study would come to the institute because it would be very good for them. Although some students do not like the idea of an institute and only want to go to a college or a university, everyone should know about the institute because it is very good." Like C2, she confirmed that she preferred physical attendance at the institute instead of online attendance, as it was easier for students.

C5 (a 35-year-old single student in the advanced ACT diploma program) had been told about the institute by her sister, who had studied EHS there and had graduated from Certificate Four after getting 4 in IELTS 4, although she had not applied to continue her diploma. The sister's experience was positive, and it was she who encouraged C4 to apply to the institute. The registration procedures for accounting had been smooth. According to her narrative, she was very hard working.

With regard to her experience at the institute, C6 (a 47-year-old married student in the EHS diploma program) said: "I am creative in EHS, but the language is the only

obstacle. I have learned all Emergency First Aid aspects but if you asked me to teach it, I would not be able to do so. I was even the leader in the first aid group at the Family Centre, but now it is difficult. For me, the English language has been a barrier. The teacher supported me by asking other students to translate for me. I am more comfortable with female teachers. When I first registered at the institute, I saw males, and I wanted to withdraw. I wear *niqab*, and I am not used to having male teachers." She said that she would organize her time and write revision schedules before her exams. Some of the material from courses she had taken before joining the institute was the same, and her teacher was the same one who had taught her previously. She scored 1000 in her EmSAT mock test and 800 in the actual EmSAT test. Her academic experience at the institute was generally good, although there were some issues. She described her experience as follows: "When I first arrived, the security guard showed me the class. I had a teacher from south Africa, and I was surprised because I was not used to male teachers teaching us. The girls were more open, so I felt strange. I was hard working, and I benefited from my classmates, and they benefitted from me as well. When we moved to the new building, we were closer to the administration building."

WD1 (a 23-year-old student who had withdrawn from the first year of an EHS diploma – Certificate 4) gave an account of her sister and friend's experience before they graduated from the institute. One of them had studied ACT, and the other EHS. Both had a positive experience at the institute and had no complaints. WD1 revealed that she had ended her studies following sickness and could not return because she was still not well. When she decided to return to her studies, she had to repeat all her subjects again, although she wanted to resume from where she had left off. In addition, she had family commitments, and her mother did not want her to resume because she was concerned about her. She also added that all the students that she knew had completed their courses, except for two who had married and were planning to return to their studies.

When WD2 (a 26-year-old student who had withdrawn from the English foundation program) registered at the institute, she had greater expectations. She felt that the place was like a "school," although schools were tidier and better. She added that even the rules were similar to those in schools. She was not satisfied with the length of classes, as they lasted nearly two hours. She also said that teachers were native English

speakers and spoke in English all the time, which was different from what she had been used to. When she first registered for and carried out the IPT (internal placement test), she was supposed to be in level 1, but because there were not enough students at this level for a whole class, she had been placed in level 2. WD2 had difficult family circumstances, as she had to take responsibility for her family after the death of her father. This led to her being unable to complete her studies, and she was forced to withdraw.

WG1 (a 30-year-old single student who had graduated from the ACT diploma program but withdrawn from the advanced diploma program) recounted her aunt's experience at the institute. Her aunt had studied there and graduated with a major in event management, although this major was no longer offered. Moreover, a friend had specialized in IT, which was no longer offered either. In terms of her experience at the institute, she described it as "excellent," and she had become more confident and was not afraid to make mistakes. She advised anyone who had not been accepted at UAEU or HCT to register at the institute.

WG2 (a 25-year-old married student who had graduated from the English diploma program but withdrawn from the advanced diploma program) stated that her only negative experience at the institute was being marked absent even though she had an excuse. However, her teachers had helped her and would not mark her absent if she had an excuse. It had been positive for her that the institute would send students on practical placements, since the students believed that they would gain better understanding of the knowledge they were taught through rom practical projects than by studying and writing. After each project, the students had to present what they had learned, enabling the teacher to ascertain who had understood their parts of the project and who didn't. The outside training lasted between a month to two months.

When WG3 (a 27-year-old single student who had graduated from the ACT diploma program and withdrawn from the advanced diploma program) first registered at the institute, everything had gone smoothly, and she had been informed about the majors offered. Before she decided on a major, she attended a workshop provided by the institute's training staff. She said:

I thought I would never choose accounting; it was the last major that I considered. I used to think that working in accounting would cause me many problems, especially in the banking sector as it involves money and therefore any minor error would hold the employee accountable. At that time, there were only accounting and EHS majors. I didn't like EHS, but my training in the court and at the municipality led me to choose accounting and not EHS. Working in an office is better for me than working in the field.

She was travelling overseas when the institute contacted her; then after, she returned and registered there. She enjoyed all the subjects because each one was like a whole specialization to her. She liked practical classes, as opposed to academic classes, because academic classes would mainly rely on memorization.

Her training was in the accounting department at Hazaa Stadium for a month. However, she had received training in the court and at the municipality even before she registered at the institute. In terms of her experience during her diploma, she said that she had not been enthusiastic at first about the ACT major, but things had turned around when she discovered that the subjects were interesting, and it was different from what she had expected. She recalled that she had enjoyed her major and the subjects she studied, since she was always learning new things. She also stated that even during recess she had been eager to start the next class. When she first registered at the institute, she had not known anyone, but this changed and she made new friends. She registered for the advanced diploma just to increase the number of students applying to study for it so that management would approve the establishment of the class for her friends. However, she had to withdraw due to family circumstances.

According to FA1 (a 27-year-old single student who failed due to absences), her learning experience at the institute had been positive, and she benefitted a lot from it, especially in terms of learning English, since she had started learning from a basic level. She recalled, however, that the language was very difficult, and she did not quite understand the foreign teachers.

From the point of view of the AM (Academic Manager), the participants' academic performance varies. He said: "When I first came to the institute, the students' academic performance was not that good, but there has been a gradual improvement compared with older intakes." Among the reasons for this improvement, he said, is that national students have become more culturally aware of the importance of education for securing jobs; they know that without a certificate, they will not find work. He stated that there is a difference in academic level between the students pursuing a vocational path and those pursuing an academic path. Vocational path students have strong capabilities in practical and manual areas, whereas academic path students excel in studies that involves theoretical and knowledge studies.

Nevertheless, AM also revealed that vocational students have low academic tendencies, and their performance at the institute is not initially good. However, there has been a gradual improvement, since they have become more culturally aware of the importance of education for securing employment. They know that without a certificate, they will not find work. Therefore, there has been an improvement in the academic attainment of these students. Their performance, nonetheless, is also affected by their motivation and the resources available.

H1 (Head Teacher) pointed out that some of the students have family commitments, while others want to have fun and do not care about failing. Some are motivated initially, but sometimes it falls away over time. Whether this happens mainly depends on the teachers' performance and the students' interest in the subject. H1 preferred face-to-face teaching instead of online teaching because face-to-face communication is more effective, especially for new students, as they do not know their teachers and find it difficult to adapt. Some students at the institute have difficulty committing to their attendance. According to H1, students withdraw, end their studies, or lose interest in studying for various reasons. This may be due to their timetables not being flexible, the lack of programs offered, and especially the ones that students enjoy, their family and personal circumstances, or sometimes their desire for specializations that have more career opportunities, based on their own observations or the recommendations of their family or friends.

H2 (Head Teacher) indicated that even when students finish the English foundation program, only around 15% of them achieve the necessary EmSAT score. However, despite their difficulty with English, around 70% of them are able to accomplish what was required of them when they enter their chosen major. He also confirmed that English is among the main barriers encountered by students. He said: "The students' academic performance is acceptable for vocational training, but the language is a barrier because if they aren't strong in English, they won't understand important concepts. Many of them have an issue with the language." He added that it would be better for them if the curriculum were taught in their mother language. He also agreed with H1 in his preference for face-to-face over the online learning. He admitted that online education creates obstacles for students. In addition, he stated that those who join the institute were usually adults and mature students who want to prove themselves. However, he also observed that some of the younger students are somewhat not serious about their studies. He recalled entering a stage 1 class in which most of the students were new. He said: "Thirteen out of 30 students had not submitted their assessment. They were new thought they could manipulate the situation to their favor. I told them that the institute takes learning seriously and that, according to the academic policies, students who do not commit to their studies will usually be given warnings, and sometimes it will lead to dismissal. The day after, the teacher told me that all of the students had submitted their assignments, except for just three of them, which I considered to be major progress."

As mentioned already, A1 (Administrative Staff) believed a majority of students to be low achievers, and the rest of them hard working. Concerning students' commitment to attendance, she stated that if the institute is strict with students, issuing them academic and attendance warnings and applying the rules, the students would be more serious about attendance and studying, and most of them would commit. Regarding the institute's admission criteria, she said: "Students are accepted at our institute regardless of their academic performance and whether they are from the scientific or literary stream. It depends on their career advice, but career advice should begin during the 10th grade, not just when they start higher education. Since their thinking changes from one year to the next, there should be a career advisor starting from grade 10 so that

they can prepare for IELTS and EmSAT." In her view, students at the institute feel like they are at school, not university. She attributed this to different reasons, such as students feeling that they are treated like they are "at school," the supervision and monitoring by staff and management that students believe to be unnecessary, inflexible timetables that are preferred mainly by married and employed students, there being no activities similar to those at other colleges and universities such as HCT and UAEU, there being no open days or clubs for activities that have a president and vice-president selected from the students and staff, and there being no special room for music, art, games, traditional games, or working out. With regard to online learning, she pointed out that half of the students prefer online over traditional learning; this is especially the case among shy ones and those with family responsibilities, such as married students.

As stated already, A3 (Administrative Staff) said that the institute enhances students' skills and prepares them for the labor market. Some students, however, tend to put off their assignments until the last minute, which overloads them and therefore makes it difficult for them to succeed.

T1 (teacher in the English foundation program) said that teachers have huge impact on students' learning experiences and the majors they chose. She said:

> *If the teacher makes the subject matter engaging and interesting, they might inspire the students. I was just talking to a student who had entered the tourism major and was reluctant. I told her that she would be perfect for tourism, as her English has developed ... and that she enjoyed talking to people. Small remarks like that can have an impact because a lot of students have not thought about what they want to study. Once they get here, they grasp the language. If they are undecided, a teacher could say, 'wow look at this!' or 'do you like that type of thing?' ... They want to progress; they want to do something with their lives.*

She added that "their learning experience depends on the teacher, in my opinion ... It is up to the teacher ... or set of teachers ... and it can be a totally different experience just based on the teacher." She also thought that students' language ability is different

from their actual academic performance, as even if they are motivated to study, the English language barrier may affect their performance.

T2 (teacher in the English foundation program) said that students' academic performance has changed over the previous nine years. Their performance used to be low, and their English skills were weak. He observed that many students now have higher academic performance; although it is not sufficient for them to enter a university, it is still enough for a vocational education. He was also convinced that, in the foundation program, students' overall experience depends entirely on the teacher. Some of them have a very positive experience, and they demand to return to study, while others have a negative experience. With regard to vocational programs, he said that students who had drop out of the institute do not actually want to study. The ones who complete the foundation and then enter a major are the ones who really want to study; they are more motivated because they have seen results. He added that this is the reason why foundation courses usually began with a class of 30 students and end up with just 20, although he noted that this was natural. He also said: "The one thing that students never like is disorganization. Due to constant changes to their timetables, there is a lack of certainty. Sometimes the teachers finish the curriculum ahead of time, and this leaves the students with no tasks, and they feel they are wasting their time." He continued: "Their learning experience is inconsistent because they will have a positive experience with one course with one teacher and they may have a negative experience with another." He observed that students communicate with each other and advise others about teachers' teaching and classroom management style.

In reference to students' academic performance, T3 (teacher in the vocational program) stated that it is "complicated." He said that when students first join the institute, they are not very well prepared to study in the vocational stream. He said that he had identified this from his day-to-day teaching of students. He said: "I feel like they do not even grasp simple vocabulary, and sometimes they do not absorb simple paragraphs. If I give them a scenario to read, they will fail to fully comprehend it. They keep asking about its meaning in Arabic." He was convinced that something needs to be done at the institute, even prior to students being accepted to the vocational stream, whether in the diploma or the advanced diploma programs and across all specialties. In

his opinion, there should be another option for those facing the English language barrier, which is to offer programs in Arabic. He also added that students enjoy learning as long as they do well in their studies. He suggested implementing more extra-curricular activities that will enhance students' learning. T3 also revealed that, although courses are supposed to be practical, some lessons are mainly theoretical due to a lack of the necessary resources.

T4 (teacher in the vocational program) stated that students are good in terms of knowledge, but their English is weak, even if they have already achieved the required IELTS or EmSAT to enter the major programs. This is usually apparent in their first term, but once they learn more about the subject, they will settle down by the second term. He suggested that this happens in the first term because students are intimidated by the specialized English in their subjects that affects their understanding.

4.3.2 Campus Environment

C1 expressed her disappointment with the canteen, as she did not like eating there. She said it was always crowded, and there was a shortage of staff that left her dissatisfied with the service. She would prefer to order food from outside the institute, although doing so was not allowed. Bringing food from home required her to wake up very early, which was difficult for her. She was also not satisfied with the procedures implemented for leaving the institute during the day, as this would require a guardian to come and pick her up. She recalled one time when she insisted on her mother coming to pick her up, although her home was far away from the institute.

C2 stated that she liked the building and that it was tidy and clean. She confirmed that the new building was far better from the old one and that she was comfortable in the new building.

C3 stated: "I feel that the institute system is like the school system. The schedule is the same for all students, and the design of the building and classrooms is like those of schools."

C4 stated that the institute's building was nice and tidy and better than the HCT building. She also liked the canteen, but she had not seen the gym building; although it was available, it was not ready for students to use.

C5 did not like to eat in the canteen, and she never bought food from it. Instead, she always brought food from home and put it in the locker or waited until she arrived home.

As stated earlier, C6 was from a traditional society, so having male teachers was new to her, and she needed some time to adapt; she even thought of withdrawing at some point. She said she was more comfortable dealing with female teachers due to her religious values.

WD2 did not like the old building, which she described as "very old" and "abandoned," and she was afraid to enter her classroom alone. She recalled that when she looked outside the window, she could see falling trees, which distressed her. Dust was everywhere, and she did not enjoy the canteen food. In contrast, the new building was clean, cool, and had a nice smell.

On the other hand, WD3 had a positive experience and stated that she had fun with her friends.

H1 said that some students feel that the institute is like school, but then they will discover that learning and succeeding require much work, especially in terms of their projects.

H2 pointed out that, compared with other educational institutes, the institute's overall environment is flexible and friendly.

A2 said that one of the main reasons for students losing interest is that they feel they are not treated as grown-ups due to constant monitoring and supervision. As mentioned earlier, there are few activities on the campus or open days. There are also no students' clubs for them to enjoy their hobbies or recreational activities such as music, art, games, traditional games, or gym.

T1 believed that students enjoy their experience at the institute because they get to socialize and form small communities. She also observed that they compare the institute to other educational institutes, and they wonder why there are no restaurants and why they cannot leave whenever they want. They feel that they are treated like schoolchildren and not like grown-ups. She said: “Students are vocal ... They will speak out if they have a problem and express their needs and concerns ... Although there are some introverts, in general, if students are not happy with something, they will express their opinions ... The issue is, are we responding or not to what they need and want?”

T2 said that he does not hear of any students complaining about the institute’s facilities; they mainly complain about the system. They would like a better canteen and somewhere to sit and relax; otherwise, the building and classrooms are fine.

T3 expressed that at other organizations where he has worked, there were many recreational activities on campus, and this made students happier. In contrast, there is a lack of recreational activities on the institute’s campus.

T4 said that students are always demanding, and that they are never fully content with anything. Students always need more, whether in terms of their grades or the institute’s resources. He said that students always complain about the canteen, although the institute has changed it. In his opinion, students prefer to order food from outside the campus. He observed that even if their demands are met, students will still want more.

4.3.3 Relationship with Administrators and Instructors

C1 had a positive experience with the AM, her instructors, and the administrative staff. She recalled that the AM had encouraged her to complete her studies. She added: “During my studies, I had a positive experience with the teachers and administrators. They replied quickly to our requests and inquiries. But during online learning, this changed slightly. It might be because they had a lot of pressure at work. Everything is okay, and the teachers follow up with us all the time because they want students to submit their work, especially Mr. H and Mr. S. During my pregnancies, Mr. H and Mr. S were very flexible with me.” With regard to her experience with the administrative staff, she recalled that it was fine.

C2 indicated that she had positive experiences with her teachers, as they treated students as responsible adults, and they knew that some students were mature and treated them differently from the younger ones. She believed that there was a mutual respect between teachers and students. However, she expressed sometimes, when she had a request for the administration, there would be a delay in the process, although she admitted that she did not make requests often. However, the administrators would sometimes call her in because they wanted to thank her for her efforts.

C3 said that the institute was the first place she had studied after she got married and moved from Oman. She recounted that it was different from what she used to see at school, as some students at the institute would often chat with their teachers. She also said that some students misbehaved; there should be a strict policy concerning this, and teachers should be given more authority to implement behavioral discipline. She appreciated and liked the teachers who were firm with students and set boundaries.

C4 stated that her experiences with the teachers had been positive, saying: "Teachers help us a lot; they make the curriculum easy, even if it is difficult. They help us understand, and teachers like Mr. Y and Mr. K contact us through WhatsApp. The head teacher communicates with us and tells us to contact him if we need anything. All the teachers who have taught me have been very good." The only thing that she was not satisfied with concerned one of the teachers who did not agree with repeating lessons and was strict about students paying attention. She said that some teachers could make an easy subject difficult. Concerning her relationship with the administrators, she recalled that they were cooperative, and that all those she had dealt with were friendly and helpful.

C5's experience with the teachers and administrators was better than her experience during high school. She had a positive relationship with all her teachers.

C6 recalled that Ms. R was very cooperative with her and that she had received good marks in the subjects she had taught. She stated that she was the best teacher in the EHS major in terms of her knowledge of the subject. The only barrier she had faced was the English language, although she was relieved that Ms. R had asked her classmates to translate for her. She was comfortable in Ms. R's class because the teacher was female.

She also recalled A3 when she first registered, as she was the one who had told her that she would begin her studies the following term. She remembered that she told A3 that she was in her forties and that it might be too late for her to study, but A3 told her that she would be accepted to study even if she were in her sixties.

C5 was also thankful to her teachers Ms. D, Ms. J, and Ms. F because they supported her greatly, and she was comfortable dealing with them because they were female. She added: “Ms. W was very friendly with us, and she used to follow up with us individually. She cared a lot about those who cared about their studies. Miss L, the math teacher, was also good. In the major subjects, Ms. R was the best. She was strong and cool, and told us that studying was important for our lives and our future careers. Also, Ms. F made many lessons easy for us. Mr. M was serious and firm in his teaching. I would contact A2 if there were any complaints, and she thankfully supported me when I was about to repeat a subject.”

WD1 recalled: “There was one teacher I will always remember; his name was Mr. Y. He used to encourage students and knew how to teach and explain things easily. He was the only one I remember from the institute. I don’t socialize much, and all of them were kind and would help us.”

With reference to the relationship between WD2 and the administrators, she said: “I did not deal much with the administrators in the old building, but in the new one, some of them were very sweet and friendly, but others were strict and firm.” She also recalled an incident when the response to her request had been delayed.

WD3 stated that some of the teachers had been friendly, while others were strict, especially when recording attendance. She also expressed that some teachers had made extra effort and utilized body language to help students understand their lessons better. With regard to her relationship with the administrative staff, she said that it had been positive.

Regarding her opinion of the teachers, WG1 said that studying had been flexible and her teachers had done their job very well. However, she had found it difficult to understand their foreign accents. Nevertheless, she believed it to be better to have foreign teachers so that students would be compelled to speak English. She also

appreciated her teachers Ms. A, Ms. Z, Mr. A, Mr. AY, and Mr. U; they were initially very strict and gave students low marks, but later on, the students started working harder, and they understood that their teachers had been looking out for their best interests. Furthermore, she viewed the administrative staff as very classy, and she respected them. She added: “Students need someone who is strict with them. I studied at both the old and new buildings, and young girls need a firm hand. Some people are young but have more experience and know how to deal with other people.”

WG2 said that the teachers had been very flexible, helpful, and cooperative, especially when she was pregnant and still studying. She added that the teachers were the ones who had helped and supported her when she had issues. She continued: “The teachers were very good and smart, and the students benefited from their experience.” She singled out Mr. K, Mr. M, and Mr. Y. From her point of view, Mr. K was the best and had the most experience in his subject. Concerning students’ relationship with the administrators, she believed that the administrators ensured the rules were implemented; according to them, “rules are the rules.” She confirmed that there had been no stress at the institute, except for when the students would be taking exams, and even then, the teacher would sometimes ask students to complete a project instead of an exam, which was quite convenient.

WG3 recalled Mr. E, who would encourage her and tell her she could accomplish anything as long as she had the passion for it. She added: “I learned something from every teacher—from Mr. U, Ms. A, and Mr. A. When I didn’t understand something, I would ask Ms. A to explain it to me—Mr. A too. Mr. B, the leader of the volunteering team I was working with, told me it was OK to ask for help.”

Regarding relationships with students, H1 said: “Students are usually warm-hearted and friendly, but sometimes they are demanding. They sometimes contact their teachers at night, especially during online learning. If teachers do not answer immediately, the students get irritated and complain.” She also confirmed that there is generally a positive relationship between the teachers and students.

H2 expressed that the pressure is too high at the start of each term. He said: “Students are very impatient, and I communicate each week with administration to

follow up. Both teachers and administrators are friendly and take students' requests and inquiries seriously. We, as head teachers, try to resolve any conflicts between the teachers and students."

A1 warned teachers not to be too lenient with students, as they sometimes take advantage and assume that they are eligible for favors and better marks. From her perspective, there have to be healthy boundaries between teachers and students. She also added that not many students praise the administrative staff, as they are the ones who follow up on students' attendance and ensure they comply with the rules and policies of the institute. From the point of view of the students, they see administration as strict, and they did not like it.

Regarding the relationship between students and teachers, A2 said: "The relationship with the teachers is good; some of the students trust their teachers and ask for their help, but some fear their teachers." She added: "We, as administrators, always try to get students to refer back to their teachers. It is also our duty to make students trust us and their teachers."

A3 indicated that "some students have good things to say about the teachers and administrators, while others say otherwise. In general, the relationship is variable. Some students complain about being overloaded with assignments, but still, they do put off their assignments." Finally, in terms of the relationship between students and the administration staff, she said that it is fairly good.

T1 pointed out that students' experiences depend on their relationship with their teachers. She said that when students first begin their studies, they are anxious and want to do well, and they pay attention in class. She stated that sometimes, after they become used to their teachers, they will be transferred to other classes because of timetable changes that affect them negatively. She believed that students mainly communicate with their teachers, since they meet them daily. From her perspective, teachers are often the students' "voice" for a number of issues.

T2 perceived that students' relationships with their teachers are fairly good, with few exceptions. He said that most teachers have a very good relationship with their students, as they always listen to them due their daily contact with them. He added that

students also have good relationships with the head teachers, as their doors are always open, and they try to help them whenever they can.

T3 expressed that students' experiences with the teachers are generally good. He added that, due to learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' engagement has increased with students, and they try to be more flexible with them.

T4 expressed that students are in contact with their teachers even more than with their families, as they spend more than half of each day at the institute. However, he observed that their relationships will be good with their teachers until they do not like their marks; that is the time when they reach out either to head teachers or the administration to complain. He added that he appreciates the efforts of the administration staff, as they try their best to support students to the best of their capacity.

4.4 Results for Q2: The Significant External Factors that Impact Female Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE

4.4.1. Location of the Institute

When the institute was first established, it was in one of the Ministry of Education offices; it was then moved to a school building in Al Mu'taredh area, where it remained until 2017. After that, it was transferred to one of the new ATHS buildings in the Al Hili area that was larger and had better facilities. The institute provides free transportation for the students. Usually, each bus is dedicated to a particular area or a couple of nearby areas and passes by these areas at a specific time to take students to the institute. Some areas are not far away, but the fact that the bus frequently stops to picks up students makes the ride longer than it actually is.

According to C1, who lived in Zakher (30 minutes from the institute), she "used to come to the institute by car but needed to wake up early because sometimes the road was too busy." She appreciated the fact that her teachers were flexible when recording attendance for the first period, but some of the students would sometimes take advantage of this and arrive late without a valid reason.

C2, who lived in Al Yahar (31 minutes from the institute), learned how to drive and obtained a driving license because using the bus made the distance longer by picking

up a number of students before reaching the institute. She said that she had since moved to another neighborhood that was further from the institute.

C4, who resided in Um Ghafa (41 minutes from the institute), said that she opted out of the bus and used a car because of the long distance.

In contrast, C5 lived in Al Bateen, which was near to the institute (20 minutes).

C6, who lived in Al Yahar (31 minutes from the institute), said that the institute was too far, so she would sometimes come by bus and at other times travel with her friend.

WD1 said that when she moved to Ain Al Fayda (31 minutes from the institute), the institute became very distant.

WD2 lived in Um Ghafa and said that it was very far away, which was why she had ended her studies and planned to attain IELTS or EmSAT to join the diploma directly.

WD3 lived in Al Goa' (90 minutes from the institute), which was a long way away. She stated: "There were three of us students, and we used to go by bus. We would wake up very early, and the bus would pass by at around 6 am." She also recalled: "We couldn't see our parents because we used to come back late. That is why I stopped, but there is nowhere else nearby in our area to study. The distance to the institute is very far, and the bus not only passed through Al Goa' but also Al Wagan, Keryah, and sometimes Al Dhaher." She emphasized that she had only withdrawn because of the long distance, and that "if the institute had been near home, [she] would have completed [her] studies in the EHS major."

WG1, who lived in Ganeema (26 minutes from the institute), said that she would like to join the advanced diploma and complete her studies if it was offered again, since she did not now have any problems with the transportation (she used to live in another area).

WG2 said that she used to live in Al Sulaimat (32 minutes from the institute) but had since moved with her family to Al Qattara, and this was 10 minutes away from the institute.

G1 (31-year-old single and employed retail program graduate), who lived in Um Ghafa (41 minutes from the institute), said that it was a long way from her house and her workplace.

FA1, who lived in Al Yaher (31 minutes from the institute), wished that the institute had been closer and said that she did not have access at the time to good transportation or know how to drive, but now she had a driving license. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she had tried to resume her studies, but since the new building was in Al Hili, she could not continue and had to withdraw. She added that she had not registered elsewhere.

In contrast, none of the staff mentioned that the location of the institute had an impact on students' enrollment.

4.4.2 School and Previous Enrollment Experience

C1 went to Al Zaydiya secondary school in Zakher, and her memories of the school included liking literary subjects, especially history. She also enjoyed math because her teacher used to make the subject easy for her, but she hated physics. After she graduated from secondary school, she applied to UAEU, but because of her family circumstances, she could not attain the required IELTS and had a high absence rate. She was disappointed that the university did not take her circumstances into consideration, and as a result, she had to withdraw from it.

C2 studied at a school in Al Yahar until she finished grade 11 and then joined a private school for grade 12. She chose the scientific stream, and according to her narrative, she was one of the distinguished students and had a good reputation. After that, she joined UAEU, but due to some special circumstances, she had withdrawn from her studies and registered at the institute. After that, she said that she could not attain the required IELTS band score because she was pregnant at the time, and when she wanted

to return to study at UAEU, she did not have IELTS, so she had to withdraw and apply to the institute.

C3 was originally from Oman, and all her schooling had been completed there. She had both negative and positive experiences of the subjects she favored. She said: “In my school, there was a math teacher who was not very cooperative, as she wanted us to book her for paid private tutoring. I had a private tutor later, and now I am perfect at math. The subject that I really hated was physics. I can understand it, but it requires more imagination on the learner’s part to understand the theories. The rest of the subjects were easy at school.” Her secondary certificate was too old, which is why she was not accepted when she applied to HCT.

C4 finished her secondary schooling at Um Alsheyam in Um Ghafa. She confessed that she did not take her studies seriously in grade 12. She used to like math, but she did not like literary subjects. At the time, she believed that such subjects had no meaning in life. She chose UAEU but was not accepted because of her low GPA, although she had IELTS 5.5. After that, she registered for and entered HCT, but did not like the business major. She added that studying at HCT was very difficult because students were treated more independently, so she did not get the support she needed. Her last resort was to register at the institute. After that, she chose TLA, but she did not like it either. She changed her major to EHS and continued with it until the time of the interview.

C5 went to Al Sarooj secondary school. She had a very difficult experience after secondary school, which she described as follows: “After high school, I studied at HCT but had difficult family circumstances, as a family member had passed away. Accordingly, I could not attend, and then I ended my studies. Since HCT’s policy states that anyone who withdraws more than once is not allowed to return, I could not resume my studies there.” In her opinion, HCT’s procedures and rules are very strict, especially in terms of attendance. When she showed the university her family member’s death certificate, it was not accepted. She was assured that it would be entered into the system, but somehow this did not happen. She said that she was “surprised” when she was given an attendance warning. She added that at HCT, lectures and exams would take place at

the same time, especially during the period of online learning, so that students did not have much time to study.

C6 came to the UAE in 2000. She soon asked about where she could complete her studies but then fell pregnant, and her dreams and ambitions went on to change. She had seven children born one after the other. She was young at the time and had no housemaid, and her husband was retired. Because of her responsibilities, she could not complete her studies. After her children had grown up, however, and with relatively fewer responsibilities, she once again started to pursue her dream. She studied at one of the Family Foundation Development (FDF) centers and was then transferred to a school near Family Clinic in Al Shuaiba. She had married when she was in grade 8, which she completed in Yemen, where she had spent her early life. She said that when she was at school, she was always at the top of her class. Her name, along with the names of other distinguished students, was published in newspapers. She could not complete her studies, however, because she used to reside in Tareem, which was a village in Hadramoot, where schools were only for boys; thus, she had to travel to another governorate where her grandfather lived. She said: "The best period of my studies when I was at the FDF adult education school. All the teachers and the principal were like a big family. I have a passion for education and love reading. My father used to teach me Islamic and Arabic culture." She expressed with pride that she had been one of the distinguished students at the center. She then joined a Tawteen career preparation program in 2008, and after completing it, she hoped to get a job. She said that she could not register at university because it would take too long to complete the course, so she decided to register at the institute, because the study period was shorter, and began studying there in 2017.

WD1 studied at Umm Kalthum secondary school in Al Maqam in 2015 and achieved a GPA of 82%. She was in the literary stream. She recalled that her experience with her schoolteachers and classmates had been good. She had a passion for learning and particularly enjoyed religion and biology, but she hated physics and math because they were difficult enough, and, from her perspective, her teachers made them even harder. She said that teachers had a large role in making students hate or like any subject. After grade 12, she was not accepted to UAEU because she had not attained the required CEPA score. Her only other option was to register at the institute, which she did.

WD2 studied at an FDF adult education center in Al Markhaniyah (this center was called Al Dhabyaniah, but its name has since changed). She graduated from secondary school in 2017. According to her narrative, “The schoolteachers were like our sisters. There were young girls studying with us, and we used to help each other succeed. Our timetable was normal and went from 8 am until 1 pm. I finished grade 12 with 86.6%. I was very hard working. I used to enjoy history, geography, and chemistry. Even though I am not very good in chemistry, the teacher made me like the subject due to her teaching style. She used to help students. I did not like English, however, although I used to get high marks.” After she finished grade 12, she immediately registered at the institute but was unable to stay for longer than two weeks.

WD3 studied in the literary stream at an Al Goa’ secondary school and enjoyed social studies. From her perspective, teaching style had a large role in the ability of students to understand and like a subject. Math was very difficult for her, her Arabic teacher did not teach very well, and she used to hate physics, although she liked the teacher because her class was fun. Her English teacher was foreign, but she did not remember where she was from. She recalled that she had a good relationship with her classmates and that her performance was good. She revealed that she was ill during grade 12, and that was why she had not done very well in her studies. She used to have constant abdominal pain and underwent surgery. According to her narrative, she believed that this was due to the “evil eye,” which her family also believed.

WG1 finished secondary school in 2008. She recalled that she was very shy in school, contrary to how she was at the institute. She had difficulty learning English at school, due to her shyness, especially when the English teacher asked her to read passages in English. She said: “I felt that everyone was looking at me.” Comparing her school experience with that at the institute, she said that she was now more confident and not afraid to make mistakes; she was willing to participate and also answer teachers’ questions. Before she entered the institute, she registered at UAEU, but it required IELTS, which she did not have at the time. She then registered at Abu Dhabi University, but she did not attain the required IELTS band score, which was 5, which was why she could not complete her studies there. She recalled that studying at Abu Dhabi University had been very difficult.

WG2 finished grade 12 at Umm Kalthum secondary school in 2015. She recalled that her academic performance there had been mediocre. She used to like social studies and history, adding that her history teacher was strict with the students and required everyone to participate, regardless of whether they knew the answers or not. This compelled them to prepare for the class ahead of time.

WG3 finished grade 12 at Mariam Bint Sultan school in Al Towayya. In her narrative, she said:

> *I used to hate school for no specific reason; I just hated it. The preparatory stage was fine. When I began high school, I had the best teacher, as she had good manners. Some teachers would give you strong basics but some of them did not. That kind of teacher negatively affects student. From my point of view, teachers can either encourage or frustrate you. I recall one teacher who always frustrated and discouraged me. My classmates used to call her 'paddles' cracker' (an Arabic proverb that means that she always discourages them). At the start, I chose the scientific stream, but I only remained in it for one week because of the teacher, who was not encouraging. She deliberately failed me for my first exam and made me repeat the exam. Then I moved to the literary stream, but due to my bad luck, the same teacher taught us. I used to like psychology and physics and hated chemistry. Anyway, when you are young, it is hard to judge teachers in a reasonable way because at that age, you do not know what is best for you. In our last days at school, foreign teachers were brought in, and this put pressure onto the teachers at the school at that time.*

G1, who was a graduate from the retail program, which was run in cooperation with Al-Futtaim as part of its initiative to provide employment to nationals, recalled that when she was in grade 12 at Al Hosn secondary school, she used to work hard, study a lot, and had a guilty conscience if she did not study well at school, which resulted in her graduating with 93.3%—a result that even shocked her. She then entered university was in the first intake of graduates for the human resources (HR) major. She did not know anything about this major at the beginning but chose it because it was new, and she thought there would lead to many job vacancies. The other subjects she took were

accounting and finance. After her graduation from the university, she was unemployed for five years and stayed at home. She was also spent part of her studies training at the UAEU Medical College for 4–5 months and was a volunteer in the HR department at Al Ain Zoo from 5–6 months.

FA1 graduated from high school in 2015. Her experience at the school was good, and her communication with the teachers was also fairly good. The subjects were easy, and the teachers would help the students. She used to love math and social studies.

H1 said that students entering the institute are usually low achievers, and their performance is often influenced by their motivation. Some of them have family commitments, and others want to have fun and do not care about failing. She added that the academic performance of the students mostly has an impact on their choice of which educational institute they enroll in.

H2 stated that students who enter the institute were already low achievers and choose it because they have not been accepted into other educational institutes either because of low GPA or EmSAT results. This is reflected by the institute's graduation output, as it is considered low.

A1 confirmed that "around 60% of students are low achievers, and only 30% of students are hardworking and care about their studies." She added that "students get accepted to our institute regardless of their academic performance and whether they are from the literary or scientific streams ... Students who have been dismissed from public college and university join the institute because everything is easy at the institute, and there are no strict rules, they say." She believes that females are more prepared to choose their future plans and careers, compared with their male counterparts, especially those from a younger age. She said: "If you ask a KG girl what she wants to be in the future, she will tell you that she wants to be a doctor." She added that females have more options than males.

A2 shared H1, H2, and A1's opinion, believing that students who join the institute are low achievers at high school. She said: "There are few students who are high achievers and choose to study at the institute. Some of the students do not attain high

CEPA or EmSAT scores and are not accepted elsewhere." She believes that low admission criteria have a negative impact on the academic quality of the institute.

Nevertheless, A3 stated that students' academic performance is variable. She expressed that some of the students who have not done very well at public college do well at the institute. Some very good students are negatively influence by either their friends or family, she said.

T1 observed that there has been a big difference in students' academic performance over the seven years that she had been working there. She noticed that students joining the institute increasingly have more "digital literacy" in recent years than in previous intakes. She said that they have become more eager and motivated to learn.

T2 made the same observation by recalling how, nine years ago, the academic performance of students joining the institute was "low" and "weak." He said that recent intakes have come with better academic performance than previous ones.

With reference to students' previous school experiences, T4 stated that some students had been "rejected" from other higher educational institutes, and this has affected their self-esteem and confidence. Teachers try to motivate them by explaining that vocational programs are more practical and hands-on, which has had a positive impact on the students. He stated that once students are "acknowledged," teachers will start to see the difference, and they become more confident by the time they graduate.

4.4.3 Purpose of Studying

C1's plan for the future involved finding a job in the public sector. If this were not possible, her second option would be to search for job in the private sector. In general, she said that she did not have a specific plan or goal in mind.

C2, who studied for a TLA diploma, said there was an EHS graduate from the institute who was employed at her sister's workplace. That would mean, she concluded, that that if she studied and graduated from the institute, she would also find a job. Nevertheless, she had some doubts, since most of the institute's graduates who had secured jobs were those who had majored in EHS; thus, TLA graduates were less likely

to find work. From her point of view, she believed that the diploma certificate was equivalent to a high school qualification. Regardless of these issues, she was eager to finish her diploma.

C3 planned to find good employment opportunities after her graduation and intended to focus more on her family.

C4 planned to continue her studies and join the advanced diploma program. She said that if the institute were to offer the bachelor's degree, she would join it and complete her studies. She added that if other universities offered equivalency for the subjects she had passed at the institute, she would complete her bachelor's there. She would like to work for the sewerage company or Al Ain Municipality. She had never missed any term since she began studying because she wanted to finish and find a job.

C5, who was studying for the accounting advanced diploma, planned to work after finishing her studies and save money to start her own business. She wanted to find good employment opportunities to serve her country, but she did not want to work in the banking sector.

According to C6, some students regretted not being able to complete university. She said that she considered them as her daughters and encouraged them to work hard and study. She expressed her regret for all the time that she lost. She said: "Our country has served us a lot, and we need to repay it in any way. I hope my voice will be heard, as students do not take their studies at the institute seriously. They are afraid of failure, and their will is easily broken. They see the institute as not a place for studying, and I tell them that it prepares you for work. They only want to have fun and think that this is the way they will pass."

WD2 wanted to complete her studies and work. Her dream was to be a history teacher.

WD3 was currently looking for a job. She had applied for one and was waiting for a reply. She hoped to resume her studies, especially during the online learning period, but she knew that online learning would soon cease.

WG1 would like to complete her studies and even finish a higher degree, since she had no issues with transportation, as she had a driving license and a car at the time of the interview.

WG2 was applying for jobs. She said that she had already received responses, but there had been issues with hiring at the time. She added that she had applied to Tadbeer in Al Ain Mall, but it seemed that there was an issue with recruitment there, as the branch was still present but also closed. If she did not get hired, she would continue her studies at Abu Dhabi University. She had asked the university about equivalency was told that it was waiting for an agreement with the institute, but this had not yet happened. She also intended to study for an advanced diploma if it was offered again at the institute. She asked: "Why don't they offer bachelor's degrees at the institute?" She had applied for a teacher's assistant job at the MoE because she had training at one of the schools that also had an EHS staff member. She also applied online for a job at Al Ain Farm and other places.

WG3 had found out about the institute from two of her friends who were graduates, and they would talk positively about how it offered practical courses. After her diploma graduation, WG3 had asked the training supervisor for suggestions of what to do next and was told that she should register at Abu Dhabi University. There were also three students from the institute studying at Al Ain University. In terms of her future plan and hobbies, she hoped to complete a bachelor's degree in the future. She wanted to start her own business and travel around the world. She was passionate about visiting places such as Kerala in India. At the time of the interview, she was learning agriculture and had a good experience in it. After her diploma, she had trained for between one and a half and two months. After that, she tried to develop herself by taking courses in accounting and general business. She had also tried to develop her social skills so that she could overcome her past anxiety, especially when she dealt with men and others. She carried a lot of responsibility in her life with her family. When talking about herself, she said:

> *I am the eldest of my siblings, and I carry a lot of responsibility. I took the responsibility of following up with our family's application to obtain housing*

from the government and provided all needed documents until we got our house, such as calling banks and searching for people who wanted to exchange their house. But it is a bad feeling that I am not old enough to be able to deal with men. We also don't have a housemaid, so I do housework such as cooking and washing. I always go to hospital appointments with my mother and see to her medicine. My sisters also depend on me and never go anywhere without me.

She volunteered at the reception at the institute's student services department and recalled some of the events there, saying: "There was one girl who wanted to enter the institute and study engineering, but her father was not convinced that it was the right place. So I told him about it, using myself as an example. I told him that I am a graduate from the institute, and there are many graduates who get jobs. I also told him that there are students who have found jobs but still haven't graduated. So eventually he was convinced." She said that she had applied to the army. She had no problem with the work type and could work anywhere. She had also applied for two jobs, but they were not suitable for her. The first was at a cleaning service company as a supervisor of staff that were sent to hospitals or any other organization, but when she entered the building, she felt that it was not suitable, especially for UAE national females.

FA1 planned to start her own business in the fashion design industry. She had already begun this endeavor but had paused for a while. She had also applied for teacher assistant jobs and to employers such as public organizations and the army, but she had yet to receive any replies. She hoped that she would be able to complete her studies to find a job.

AM said that vocational training graduates are more likely secure jobs than others. The main reason for this is that the local labor market has greater need for workers in this category than others. It needs graduates with vocational competencies. He said: "I wish our vocational certificate served the market better than it does. I wish our students would also study for international professional certificates. For example, accounting students could obtain charter certificates and IT students could obtain the Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) qualification, in addition to other international certificates offered for other programs."

Nevertheless, H1 believes that jobs are secured mainly through the effort of graduates to find vacancies on the job market.

H2 felt that the current situation at the institute, compared with that of the universities, needed more attention. He said: “I think the institute needs to increase its industrial partnerships.” He insisted that industry partners should reach out to sponsor most, if not all, of the students in the major programs. He added: “All over the world, vocational training graduates are employed immediately, as they already have many professional certificates.” He suggested that the institute implement the same strategy.

With regard to job opportunities available for the graduates, A1 did not think that having a vocational diploma alone will secure work. She believes that job opportunities depend on skills, not what they have studied. She also emphasized that students would be guaranteed a job if they had a degree or an IELTS.

A2 pointed out that the institute’s graduates face different kinds of challenges after graduation. For example, the institute’s certificates used to be accredited both by the MoE and the NQA, but at the time of the interview, they were only accredited by the NQA. MoE accreditation gives more value to the certificates and enables students to complete their studies in bachelor’s programs, as CAA subjects become accredited and equalized in universities in the UAE.

A3 had a different perspective and expressed that the institute enhances students’ skills and prepares them for the labor market. She added that vocational training graduates are given higher credit than university graduates, as they have the practical skills needed for the job market.

T1 began by stating that she thought that students’ families want them to do something with their lives, either by studying or pursuing a suitable endeavor. She added that students want the same thing and do not want to stay at home. Referring to future jobs, T1 believed that opportunities are not certain. H1 agreed with T1 by expressing that one of the main objectives of a vocational training organization is to “develop the link between industry and workplace.” H1 said that she knew a lot of students who have graduated and, until the time of the interview, not secured work. In her view, part of the reason why students are discouraged from entering the institute was that they have seen

their friends and relatives graduate from it and wait for a long time without finding work. In her opinion, this "gap" between the institute and industry should be filled. She added that merely studying at the institute does not guarantee employment.

T2 agreed with A1 in terms of career advice, saying that students should be offered career counselling even when they are still in the English foundation program. He stated that students ask him all the time about the suitable majors they should choose. He admitted that he does not know many details about the institute's majors, and this is due to the English foundation teachers not being informed about the majors available. He said that this strategy is not implemented in the system. Most of the time, students seek advice from their friends and family. However, some of them are not influenced as much by their peers and families as much as by their gut feeling, as they are quite independent. He confirmed that many hardworking students can do any task they are asked to do, and that if he were a manager, he would not hesitate to hire them, although he does not know about their mentality or work ethic. He added that he does not know about the job opportunities for students in the EHS program, although he had heard that they are in demand. He said that he does know past students who graduated from the ACT program and suggested that they can find job security, although not necessarily in their own specialization. T2 also agreed with H2 and T1 on the point that there should be a link between industry and the institute. He concluded by saying that the institute trains students to be good employees, nevertheless.

T3 stated that he had read in the news about the UAE government recently starting to implement private sector projects and investing around 27 billion dirhams. He said that with this kind of governmental support, unemployed graduates will soon secure jobs in the private sector. From his perspective, part of the cause for the delay in the institute's graduates getting jobs is the English language barrier and that the curriculum is not aligned with the labor market and industry demands. As part of his job is being an internal verifier, he has visited many private and public organizations and found that they employed few graduates from the institute. Even those he has found are concerned that what they have learned is different from what is asked of them in their jobs.

From T4's standpoint, families, and fathers and brothers in particular, influence students' choice of major. He recalled knowing one student who was highly motivated to study accounting, and he would even use her as an example to motivate her classmates. Yet all of a sudden, she changed her mind about the ACT major and dropped out of the course. When he asked her why, she replied that her father had told her that the major had no future. She chose TLA instead because her father told her that it had better prospects. He also recalled the Tawteen initiative in 2015 to raise students' awareness of available job opportunities and support them in finding jobs. He added that the MoE also promote different majors and educational institutes, as they are more connected and updated with what is required in the market. He concluded that there are many job opportunities in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and even Al Ain due to their economic progress.

4.4.4 Knowing the Institute

C1's cousin told her about the institute, although she also told her that its majors were limited. She did not know much about her cousin's experience of the institute.

C2 had learned about the institute from her sister. As mentioned previously, she told her that one of her colleagues was an EHS graduate from the institute. C2 suggested changing the name of the institute to "college" or "university," because such names were used by private higher education organizations and they offer more value than the word "institute." She added that the current name suggests that its students only attend short courses, such as English courses, and not diplomas. She said that students wanted to be proud of being graduates of the institute.

C4 heard about the institute from her cousins, who had graduated from it and had good things to say about it. Her cousins always praised the institute and said that everything had gone smoothly, and that the teachers made the lessons easy.

C5's sister had studied at the institute and told her about it. She took the EHS major and graduated with Certificate 4 (first year of diploma) because she achieved 4 in IELTS 4. She took the certificate that was offered after completing one year, but she did not apply to continue the diploma. Her sister's experience had been good, and she encouraged C5 to apply to the institute. However, the only challenge she faced was

related to long days of classes. Nonetheless, she made sure that she regularly attended them during online learning, and even before.

C6's friend who used to study at HCT told her about the institute and that it offered English programs. She had registered her married daughter, who lived in Saudi Arabia, but when she did not attend, she decided to register herself.

WD1 said that she did not initially know anything about the institute. Her first choice had been UAEU, but she had not attained the required CEPA score. It also required an IELTS band of 5, and she only achieved IELTS 4. Her sisters and her friend had graduated from the institute; one had studied ACT and the other took the EHS major. They had good experiences at the institute and had no complaints.

WG2 pointed out that the institute had been unknown before it began its English foundation program that prepared students to take IELTS. She pointed out that even the IELTS exam was free for students who continued until the final level of the English foundation program.

G1 knew about the institute through an advertisement published in a WhatsApp group advertising an employment program in cooperation with Al-Futtaim group. She went to the institute, was interviewed immediately, and was informed that she had been accepted two days later. They then conducted an orientation for new applicants. After that, they started studying at the institute and working simultaneously. Following that, as the female groups finished training as supervisors in Carrefour and with the help of the institute, they were asked to choose a section to work in. She chose the Happy Household section, where televisions and handsets were sold, for which she had not received training. Her experience at the institute was not easy, since she worked and studied at the same time. She recalled that at the institute, classes began at 1 pm or 2 pm according to the instructor. It was difficult for girls to study and work at the same time. When she returned home, she would cry, and when she asked her teacher if it would be possible to quit work and continue her studies, he told her that this could not be done. If she quit work, she had to end her studies too. She thought that since she wanted to gain a certificate at the same time as working, she should continue to do both. A lot of girls resigned before they had finished their studies. The teacher told them that they could

stop studying and continue working, but they decided to leave both their studies and their jobs. They could not handle it, as some were married and had children, and they could not work in shifts and teach their children at the same time. She was one of the few girls who continued.

AM indicated that students know about the institute from their friends and relatives or from social media.

H1 agreed that students learn about the institute from their relatives and friends.

H2 added that students learn about the institute from its graduates, posters on social media, or from MoE inductions that are conducted each year.

A1 said that students learn about the institute in three ways: from friends, from relatives, and from public colleges and universities, as they sometimes refer their dismissed students to the institute. In her opinion, marketing should be activated and increased to reach as many UAE nationals as possible.

A2 indicated that students learn about the institute through school visits, MoE inductions, and their friends, relatives, and cousins, in addition to the institute's staff.

A3 also confirmed that students learn about the institute from their friends, relatives or from public colleges and universities.

T1 recalled that when she asked students about how they had learned about the institute, they said that it was by word of mouth from their friends and family members. She believed that students learned about the institute when they were involved with ACTVET programs, such as the Y2W (Yes to Work) program that was offered to school students. She was also convinced that they are informed about the institute through MoE induction programs at their high schools.

T2 believed that many students find out about the institute from friends and family members more than any other way. He added that they may also learn about the institute through social media and school visits. He recalled that the institute was once the last choice for grade 12 students, but some students have recently chosen the institute because of the engineering programs offered for females. He thus concluded that the institute is slowly gaining a better reputation. He expressed, however, that students

"unfortunately do not have a choice because other higher colleges or universities require higher EmSAT/IELTS band scores as a pre-requisite." He suggested that the institute come up with a mechanism to provide students with bilingual teaching, as most of them will not be required to use English in their workplace, since they will be employed in vocational careers.

T3 said that due to UAE cultural practices, students' family leaders usually meet at weekends in their *majlis* and discuss their options and exchange advice. He said that few UAE nationals know about the institute. He recalled nationals sometimes asking him about where he worked, and they were surprised to learn that they had no knowledge about the institute, especially since it was a governmental one. He recalled that a marketing department that previously operated at the institute worked effectively and launched several campaigns. He wished that it would do so again. He also suggested giving regular visits to companies to market the institute's programs.

T4 recalled that when the institute first opened, applicants came to know it through referrals from friends and relatives. Over the years, however, things have changed, and more advertising had been placed, leading more students having the opportunity to learn more about the institute. Students are then recruited, which is different to what happened previously.

4.5 Results for Q3: How can Female Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE be Increased?

When C3 first registered at the institute, she had expected her timetable to be flexible and that she would only be there while classes took place. She said: "I thought that I would be there during class times and that the schedule would be flexible." She said that she was a mother and had children at school, so she would appreciate a flexible timetable. She said that the institute was like a "school system" whereby all students had the same timetable. She would appreciate it if the timetable were more flexible.

WD2 also mentioned the word "school" when referring to the institute's system and said that the rules were even the same as those in schools. She also expressed her annoyance with the length of classes, as each lasted nearly two hours.

H1 said: “Students sometimes withdraw, end their studies, or lose interest because their timetable is not flexible, and the classes are too long.” She added that these students have family and personal commitments that lead them to withdraw if there is no flexibility in the timetables or if their excuses are not considered. A1 agreed, adding that students “want to choose their own timetable,” as flexible timetables are preferred, especially by married and working students.

T1 indicated that students feel “that they are treated like high school students,” and they would like more independence. A2 said that students “feel that they are grown-ups and know what’s good for them”; therefore, they are not comfortable with constant supervision.

Students such as WG1 were interested in majors that were no longer offered. She expressed her desire to enroll in event management, as her aunt had, although it was not still available. She recalled that her aunt had been employed by Etisalat and “would work in the evening and study in the morning. Her major was event management. I wanted to do the same major, but now this major is no longer offered.”

WG3 also expressed that only two majors were offered at the time, EHS and ACT, and she had not wanted to do either, although she was eventually convinced to join ACT. She recalled: “I thought I would never choose accounting; it was the last major that I would consider. I used to think that that working in accounting would cause me a lot of trouble and problems, especially in the banking sector. At that time, only accounting and EHS majors were available. I didn’t want to do EHS. My training in the court and at the municipality led me to choose accounting and not EHS. Working in an office would be better for me than working in the field.”

H1 backed up these claims and said that students lose interest “because we don’t offer all programs.” She added that students are “looking for a major that has more future opportunities.”

T1 pointed out that future jobs are not “certain” for graduates. H1 said that students “are told that some of the majors will definitely have vacancies, but when graduates apply, they don’t get work. They look for programs that are more relevant.”

T2 suggested that students need career advice, saying that "teachers do not influence students' major choices. When we teach foundation, we should be advising them on which major to take. Each term, students ask me which major they should choose." A1 agreed on the same point and confirmed that "it depends on career advice and what students were told at school. But career advice should begin in the 10th grade and not just when students enter higher education."

H2 said that "if the curriculum is taught in their mother language it would be better. It would be 200% better." T3 strongly agreed with this idea, saying: "I believe we should come up with mechanisms to provide students with bilingual teaching, and we can leave a stream for English–English. But again, they won't use English in their workplace after they find work."

A1 compared the institute with other educational institutes in terms of the activities offered, saying that there are no "open days" and that "there are no groups for activities that have a president and vice-president selected from the students and staff. In other places, there is an entire room for music, art, games, traditional games, gym, and even a *majlis*, if they want to have a meeting to discuss important topics." Aligning with this point, T3 expressed that there are few "recreational activities to support the students' learning." He also made the same comparison as A1 with other educational institutes.

With regard to the facilities, C3 and WD2 expressed that the building was old and similar to that of schools, and it needed improvement. C1 said that she would prefer to bring food in from outside the campus (from other restaurants), while C5 preferred to bring her own food from home, as there were not many food options at the institute's canteen. WD2 also expressed her dissatisfaction with the food at the canteen. This was backed up by T4, who said that students always wanted to eat outside food, which was not allowed according to the institute's policies. On the other hand, C4 said: "I like the canteen, but I haven't seen the gym because I haven't been there. We have heard about it but haven't seen it." The students would appreciate it if there were more food options and recreational facilities.

C2 said that her major, TLA, was less likely to secure her a job, and that she believed the "diploma certificate is equivalent to a high school certificate." C4 would

appreciate it if the institute offered bachelor's degrees and added that if other universities offered equivalency for her diploma, she would continue her studies. WG2 also wondered "why don't they offer bachelor's degrees at the institute?" A2 confirmed that there are many students who benefit from the institute, but they usually "face challenges after they graduate." She added that certificates used to be accredited by the MoE, which was beneficial, but until the time of the interview, they only received NQA certificates, which was "new and not well known, unlike higher education certificates."

AM expressed his wish that students could obtain international certificates such as CCNA to strengthen their chances of employment. H2 agreed with this point, saying that vocational training all over the world "provides many professional certificates."

With regard to marketing, A1 urged the institute to increase its marketing efforts to reach as many UAE nationals as possible. T3 recalled that there used to be a marketing department at each branch, and that the institute's marketing worked effectively; at that time, they used to launch "marketing campaigns" and invite "organizations and industries to present what we have so that they know more about us."

The importance of industrial partnerships was mentioned by H2, who said: "I think the institute needs to increase its industrial partnerships" and provide sponsorship for most, if not all, the students at the institute. T2 added: "I don't think we link well with industry. A lot of our students go and get jobs away from their major. I think we train them to be good employees [in general]." T3 also agreed with this point of view and clearly expressed that the "curriculum that we are designing is not aligned with industry. We teach students one thing and they unfortunately face something totally different. I worked as an internal verifier for a work placement course whereby I could link between the institute and industry. Unfortunately, I visited companies and met with the students and supervisors, and I found a huge gap between industry and what students were being taught."

4.6 Summary

This chapter is dedicated to presenting the data and analysis for this study. At the first phase, around 14 students from a vocational training institute in Al Ain were

interviewed at length. Subsequently, 10 administrative and teaching staff were interviewed in the second phase. In summary, the data gathered from the individual semi-structured in-depth interviews indicate that there were internal and external factors impacting female enrollment.

For the purpose of providing more structural clarity to the results, subcategories were drawn from the main themes derived from the interviews under two main categories: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors encompassed campus environment, learning experience, and relationships with administrators and instructors, while external factors included knowing about the institute, its location, previous schools and enrollment experiences, and purpose of studying.

As we have mentioned already, it is not the purpose of this study to find commonalities, although they do sometimes exist, but to capture the essence of the subjective realities of the female students at the vocational training institute. From their experiences, we have found out that there are multiple intertwined theories and other research that could be applied to study further some of the elements that are instilled in their complex experiences.

The results generally indicate that students' personal experiences are considered the focal point for shaping both the internal and external factors affecting female enrollment in the vocational education and training institute under study. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that these experiences be improved by providing more enhanced educational services.

In the following chapter, the findings are extensively discussed, and the recommendations and implications of the study are presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the lived experiences of female students—including current, graduate, and dropout students (or those who have withdrawn for whatever reason), as well as administrative and teaching staff—in order to identify the factors that impact Emirati female students' enrollment at the institute under study. As described in Chapter 4, internal factors were categorized as campus environment, learning experiences, and relationship with administrators and instructors while external factors were categorized as knowledge about the institute, its location, previous school and enrollment experiences, and reasons for studying. All extracted themes were organized under the relevant categories, along with details of frequency of occurrence among the three groups of interviewees (female students, instructors, and administrators) (see Appendix C). The present chapter discusses these findings and their implications and makes a number of recommendations on that basis.

5.2 Discussion of Q1: Internal Factors that Significantly Impact Female Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE

5.2.1 Learning Experience at the Campus

Most of the interviewed students, as well as those who dropped out (for whatever reason), had relatively positive academic experiences. A number of recurring themes and elements were found to determine the quality of learning experiences at the campus, including the previous experiences of friends and relatives, majors offered, English language, online learning, expectations when first enrolling, motivation, and opinions about the institute's policies.

Alwin and Otto (1977) investigated the effects of socioeconomic status and ability level on the development of college plans and occupational aspirations among high school students. Their analysis of data from 4,303 high school seniors identified curriculum placement and "college plans of peers" (p. 259) as significant influences. As mentioned before, students often compared their own experiences with their peers'

experiences inside or outside the institute. In addition, interviewees referred to the issue of gender equity—that is, ensuring that both genders have a fair chance to choose their education or major—which forms part of the study's theoretical framework. Another recurring theme was that there were "limited majors" to choose from as compared to peers who were offered more choices and graduated before them. Students who already had limited educational choices felt that this might affect their confidence in seeking to progress toward a secure future.

An extensive body of research has identified a number of reasons for student disengagement or withdrawal in vocational or tertiary education contexts. Daehlen (2017) investigated the role of factors related to motivation, self-efficacy, and individual characteristics in completion of their studies among students in vocational tracks. The study confirmed that these students exhibited low levels of motivation and self-efficacy when compared to those in the academic track and that this could be mainly attributed to previous low academic achievement at school.

The issue of constrained educational choice is often discussed in the context of low socioeconomic status and low school achievement relative to peers, but more research is needed to establish the relevance of these factors in the present context. According to Lessard-Philips et al. (2014), students' socioeconomic status and achievement toward the end of their secondary education tend to determine which track they are streamed to. It seems that students with high socioeconomic status and higher scores are likely to be directed to more prestigious or academic colleges while those with lower socioeconomic status and lower scores are likely to be streamed into vocational tracks if they have not already dropped out.

Many developing countries regard a strong vocational training sector as a key component of the educational system because it equips students with the skills that employers demand (Alzaabi, 2012). High school graduates look forward to their university years, which many regard as the most exciting years of their lives. Beyond the available classes, prospective students typically investigate other aspects of the university or school where they intend to enroll. As memories of campus life and experiences last a lifetime, many inquire about the experiences of recent graduates.

In non-English-speaking countries, learning and teaching English has been a focal point of discussion and research. Debate revolves mainly around the obstacles faced by students when learning English. In a study of 10 English classes, Alhmadi (2014) investigated the underlying reasons for low student performance in English speaking skills. She reported several such reasons, including a lack of curriculum change for many years, too many classes with the same teacher throughout the day, a lack of teacher autonomy to choose materials of relevance to students' lives, and a widespread focus on written exam models. In the present case, some of the interviewed students mentioned the English language as a key barrier to learning. For example, WD2 noted that her teacher spoke English all the time, which differed from her previous school experience. WG1 said that her teachers were mostly foreigners and that she did not understand some teachers who were Indian and spoke English with a different accent. Similarly, WG3's sister suggested that it would be easier if the teacher was an English national or came from an English-speaking country. In addition, FA1 said that the language itself was difficult and that she did not understand foreign teachers in general.

Some members of the interviewed staff also identified language difficulties as one of the main barriers to learning because those who lacked strong English skills would be unable to understand important concepts. According to H2, many students have English language difficulties, and he suggested that it would be better for them if the curriculum were taught in their mother tongue. T1 also contended that English language proficiency is not and should not be an indicator of academic performance, as the language barrier can affect even those who are motivated to study. According to T2, the academic performance and English language proficiency of students enrolling at the institute nine years ago was "low" and "weak" but that academic performance among the more recent intake was higher than before. He concluded that current students were more aware of the importance of language for their studies and employment prospects. T3 reported that students were not well prepared to study the specialized terms and concepts in English on entering their major of choice and could not grasp even simple vocabulary or concepts. He also noted that these students could not understand a scenario without asking about its meaning in Arabic. T4 added that English language difficulties remain a barrier to academic achievement, even for students with the required IELTS scores.

With reference to the online learning experience, some students and administrators believed that face-to-face physical attendance was more effective than online learning and that practical material promoted interactions and levels of application that online learning could not support. According to some interviewed administrators, online learning impacted new students in particular, as they began the year without knowing their teachers. Reflecting on their feelings about distance learning instructional methods, the issue was again situational; most preferred traditional classes because of the benefits associated with being present on campus. In addition, they favored face-to-face communication, especially for new students. According to H1, being unable to meet one's teachers in person creates a psychological barrier. H2 felt that online education also created other obstacles for students, as those enrolling at the institute were usually older and wanted to compensate and prove themselves. Nevertheless, A1 stated that 50% of the institute's students preferred online rather than traditional learning—especially those who are shy or have other responsibilities, as for example in the case of married students.

T3 argued that online learning requires teachers to search constantly for new ways of engaging students, leading to greater leniency during the Covid-19 pandemic. The rapid shift to online learning during the pandemic represents a major transformation for all educational institutes. However, as many institutes face immense difficulties in implementing effective online learning strategies, any evaluation must take account of a range of issues. In one such study, Syauqi et al. (2020) surveyed 56 mechanical engineering students at Yogyakarta State University to capture their perceptions of the online learning experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to their findings, students felt that online learning was less effective and failed to meet their expectations. Based on the students' responses, they recommended that institutions should seek to improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills by evaluating and enhancing teachers' ability to manage learning, learning materials, and instruction methods more effectively.

Other studies of online learning have focused on students' characteristics. In one quantitative study, Cigdem (2014) collected data from 725 vocational students in Balıkesir to assess their online learning readiness (OLR) and whether this relates significantly to individual characteristics. The findings indicate that successful online

learning depended on computer/Internet self-efficacy (CIS) and online communication self-efficacy (OCS) (Cigdem, 2014). In a two-stage empirical study, Aydin et al. (2015) interviewed and observed 18 Kocaeli vocational high school students in an attempt to identify their behaviors during online classes and their perceptions of online lectures. The findings suggest that communication between students and teachers has a significant effect on students' approaches to online learning and that negative perceptions of online learning technologies relate mainly to how these are implemented by teachers.

H2 addressed the underlying reasons for the low quality of the institute's output. He said that students who came to the institute were already low achievers and enrolled after being rejected by other educational institutes. In addition, A1 said that the institute's low entry requirements mean that students are accepted regardless of their academic performance or whether they come from the scientific or literary stream. She strongly believed that both enrollment at the institute and choice of major are based on inadequate career advice. A2 confirmed this point, noting that those who enroll at the institute are low achievers in high school. T2 suggested that one of the reasons for withdrawal from university was that the student did not actually want to study.

As H1 observed, the performance of low achievers who enroll at the institute is affected by their lower motivation. While some have family commitments, others want to have fun and are not concerned about failing. According to one administrator, some may be motivated at the outset, but this diminishes after some period of time, depending mainly on teacher performance and the student's interest in their subject. T1 also felt that teachers had a significant impact on the students' learning experiences and the majors they chose. She also noted that the current intake of students exhibited much higher levels of "digital literacy" than earlier groups. Some researchers have reported that high school achievement is determined by a student's abilities and background, which are characteristics that predate high school. Ability grouping or tracking is thought to magnify these differences, leading to subsequent inequities in the quality of education (Moller et al., 2011).

As the case institute specialized in vocational training, classes were necessarily more practical than theoretical, which students considered a plus point. According to

WG2, “the positive thing about the institute is that it sends us to placements to practice. Practical projects enable students to understand more than studying and writing.” While all of the interviewed students seemed reasonably satisfied with the courses offered by the institute, C3 questioned whether the instructors were qualified to teach their topic: “Non-specialized teachers from different majors such as Accounting are teaching us Tourism, which I don’t think is right.” Overall, however, the quality of the training and courses was well regarded by the students.

One recurring pattern was observed among students who persisted with their studies at the institute. At first, these students exhibited low self-esteem and poor confidence, but they gradually became more confident, possibly because of the positive impact of improved performance on their learning experiences and self-belief. As noted earlier, a majority of the interviewed students had previously enrolled at other educational institutes and had mainly negative experiences. Students who withdraw from their studies often do so because of the educational choices and performance of friends and family members who attended other more selective colleges. Revisiting Davis’s 1966 metaphor of the campus as a “frog pond,” Bassis (1977) reported some different results regarding college students’ evaluations of their own academic competence. Based on longitudinal data from a survey distributed to college freshmen, Bassis concluded that these students’ reference groups had greater impact if those friends and peers were enrolled at more selective colleges rather than their own campus.

In the UAE, one of the main factors associated with low academic performance in public education is expatriate teachers’ unsuitability as providers of inclusive education (Ibrahim & Alhosani, 2020). This in turn relates to difficulties in recruiting Emirati teachers who can teach English to the required standard. Additional subjects such as innovation, creativity, and corporate programming have been incorporated into UAE curricula as part of the government’s policy of attracting and retaining investment from certain foreign countries. The key objectives of the NSM project involve adapting the curriculum to keep up with new socioeconomic developments and to improve students’ English language and math skills (Azaza, 2018).

In one unique observation, C6 said she found the institute challenging at the outset because she was not used to male teachers. This is quite understandable, as she came from a religious family in a traditional society (Yemen), and it is a particular issue for older female students educated at public schools, where they interacted exclusively with female teachers and administrators. This important psychological factor should be highlighted when dealing with these students. Multiple studies have investigated the relationship between teachers and students in terms of gender differences, and some have referred to this as the "hidden curriculum" (e.g., Basow, 2004; Coley, 2001; Driessen, 2007). However, these studies also insist that each culture has its own unique challenges, which cannot be generalized to other societies and cultures.

In summary, the observed variations in students' academic performance can be said to depend on multiple elements. These include the on-campus learning experience, psychological aspects such as the influence of family and friends (leading students to compare and reflect on their choices and limited options aka relative deprivation), the English language barrier, online learning experiences, and instructional methods. Some students reported positive experiences such as satisfaction with their major of choice and their relatives' and friends' positive learning experiences at the institute.

5.2.2 Campus Environment

Although a majority of the interviewed students faced difficulties in getting to the institute, most preferred being on campus. In analyzing the students' feelings, we needed to be able to compare their experience to a traditional institute; because of the differing nature of instruction, every student's feelings about the institute were viewed as situational. In line with their learning experiences, students' feelings also changed between enrollment and graduation. Because these feelings are evolving, they cannot be generalized. However, both students and staff indicated that the perceived quality of the campus environment could increase or diminish students' enjoyment. In particular, they mentioned campus facilities like the canteen, as well as procedures and policies and how they are implemented, timetables and period duration, and recreational activities.

Campus facilities clearly add to the value and appeal of any institute. As a place where people spend more than half of their day, the campus should be warm and

welcoming. The stated opinions of the interviewed students led us to conclude that they were not fully satisfied with the physical appearance of the old building. However, those who studied in both the old and new buildings (e.g., C6, C4, C2, WD2) said that the new building was better.

Some of the interviewed students mentioned the canteen as one of the areas where students spend their free time, relaxing and catching up on work. Some students (e.g., C1, C5) expressed dissatisfaction that the place was crowded and the food offering lacked variety. They preferred to order food from outside or bring their own food from home. They also compared the facilities to other colleges where there was more than one restaurant for students.

No one would deny the need for appropriately equipped campus recreational facilities that support learners' wellness by providing opportunities to eat, relax, exercise, or enjoy their favorite hobbies. Students are known to research this issue when deciding where to pursue their education, and inadequate or worn-out facilities are likely to adversely affect enrollment rates. In a study of three institutions in one US state, Kampf (2010) reported that building a new recreation center increased enrollment rates by 7%.

Interviewees differed in their opinions about the institute system. C3 was dissatisfied with the system for several reasons. First, she felt that it resembled the school system in that the schedule was the same for all students; the classes and buildings were also like school, and timetables were not flexible. Some students (e.g., C5, WD2) felt that the study hours were too long. Overall, WD2 felt that her expectations were not matched by the reality.

However, the institute system also seemed to have a positive impact on the behavior of some students. For example, WG1 stated that she was too shy to speak English at school but became more confident at the institute: "At school, I felt shy if the teacher asked me to read in English—I felt everyone was looking at me. But now, everything has changed, and I participate and answer teachers' questions." Some students also indicated that there was no stress at the institute other than at exam times;

even then, as WG2 recalled, the teacher would sometimes set a project rather than an exam.

As a place where students spend more than half their day, the campus environment and physical appeal influenced their decisions. As female students are not allowed to leave the campus without a guardian, they must stay indoors; as C2 put it, “I don’t like the procedures that we must follow in order to leave the campus, which involves being accompanied by a guardian.” Once enrolled, students see themselves as adults who should have the freedom to do certain things, including leaving the campus when they so choose. Some female students felt that the specified procedure for leaving the campus was stricter than at other universities, where there was no requirement to be picked up by a guardian. Female students were displeased about this, as the need to call a guardian to exit the premises was not always ideal, especially if there was a long break between classes or if some classes were canceled.

Potential students who had heard about these issues would almost certainly be discouraged from enrolling, and this may contribute to lower rates of female enrollment in educational and training institutions. Through word of mouth, students’ positive or negative experiences are likely to influence potential students’ enrollment decisions. Some of the interviewed students claimed that they had heard about the institute from close friends or relatives, implying that they also shared their own experiences and opinions.

Analysis of the interviews with staff members revealed mixed opinions about the student experience at the institute. While some teachers and administrators said that the students seemed positive about studying at the institute, others expressed contrary views. H1 felt that students lost interest for different reasons, such as inflexible timetables, the failure to offer a full range of programs, or family and personal circumstances. H1 also believed that students were looking for a major with better future employment opportunities, based on the advice of family and friends.

A1 believed that students at the institute felt that they were at school rather than university because they were monitored and treated like kids by staff members and managers; even the canteen was closed during class times. She expressed the view that

students felt they knew what was good for them and wanted to choose their own timetable—especially those who were married or had a job. She also noted that there were no activities of the kind found in public colleges or universities. In this regard, T1 again observed that students compared the institute to other educational institutes with facilities like restaurants and where students could leave the campus whenever they wished. T2 said that students complained mainly about the system and the need for a better canteen and a place to sit and relax, but the building and classrooms were fine.

One crucial point needs to be clarified regarding some of the case institute's policies. In response to parental requests that their daughters should not leave the campus without a parent or guardian, administrative staff modified existing policies to respect this protective culture. Similarly, external factors influenced the limited food offering in the canteen, including incidences of food poisoning. For example, when students order from outside, restaurants cannot be held accountable for food poisoning in the same way as the canteen. Clearly, then, external factors beyond the administrators' control make it difficult (though not impossible) to accommodate students' preferences.

Given the lack of timetable flexibility, some students felt they were still in secondary school. However, H2 said that because the institute was a flexible and friendly environment, students sometimes took advantage and asked teachers to reassess them as many as four or five times, which affected education quality. According to A2, students also complain about the changing schedule, a lack of certainty, and occasional timewasting. "Students say that everything is easy at the institute because the rules are not strict." H1 noted that some students lose interest and withdraw because a certain program is not being offered or because courses are too inflexible. H1 added that some students expect the institute to be like school but then discover that the demands are higher, especially when working on projects. At the time of this research, the case institute was only recognized by the NQA. Despite their learning outcomes, the institute's graduates have been disadvantaged by this lack of recognition, as the NQA is still less widely recognized than certificates from higher education institutes.

In light of the above analysis, it can be concluded that students' opinions in relation to educational choices were formed largely through word of mouth. Their

learning experiences were inconsistent because some had already formed a view about their instructor even before they entered the class. Finally, as the few available extracurricular activities make staying on campus less enjoyable, the institute may need to offer more activities and facilities to attract and retain students.

5.2.3 Relationships with Administrators and Instructors

The relationship between students and administrative staff varied from one student to another; some relationships were fairly positive while some were negative, and some students did not engage with administrative staff at all. Among those who regarded administrative staff as very approachable and flexible, C1 said that student staff services were "fine." WG1 said that, in her opinion, the administrative staff were very classy, and she respected them. C4 said that all the administrative staff she dealt with were excellent. She added that because this institute did not employ traditional teaching methods, the head teacher communicated with the students and told them to contact him if they wanted anything. In general, while some students felt that administrators were strict about policies and following up on attendance, some were satisfied with how they were treated.

As one element of the campus experience, the instructor-student relationship also influenced students' decisions about whether to continue their studies, withdraw, or try to enjoy their studies if they had no choice. Most of the interviewees confirmed this by saying positive things about some of their instructors: "Mr. S was very flexible during the time I had my newborn" (C1); "The teachers are understanding, and try to make the curriculum easy on us. They follow up with us, even using WhatsApp if needed" (C4). WD1 praised one of her instructors (Mr Y), saying that he did a lot to encourage his students and made the topic easy to understand. There were also some conflicting opinions; while many students agreed about the positive features of the institute, there were some shared negative experiences within the female student community.

The relationship between students (current or prospective) and staff (academic or administrative) is among the most important at the institute, as these are key groups. In general, the students said they had a friendly relationship with staff members. According to one administrator (A1), "When I was responsible for attendance, students didn't like

me, but I used to help them." Another (A2) said that a positive relationship with their teachers helped students to trust them and to ask for their help, but some were reluctant and feared their teachers. T2 felt that most teachers had a very positive relationship with their students because they communicated with them daily and listened to them. A3 described the relationship as "variant"—in other words, while some students had good things to say about teachers and administrators, others said that the teachers did not support them. Some students were also said to complain about the overload of assignments and projects.

According to H2, both teachers and administrators were friendly and took students' requests and inquiries seriously, and head teachers tried to resolve any conflicts between teachers and students. However, some students were seen to take advantage of the friendly environment and seemed impatient, especially at the beginning of the academic year. T1 believed that a student's experiences at the institute depended mainly on their relationship with their teachers, who were often the student's "voice" when issues arose. Positive teacher-student relationships might encourage females to enroll at the institute—especially those who had put their studies on hold for a while but wanted to complete. In a study of internal and external factors differentiating women who enter traditionally male-oriented vocational training programs, Houser and Garvey (1985) reported that the decision to enroll correlated strongly with students' relationship with their teachers, counselors, and educational personnel.

Based on a Freshman Questionnaire from 1975 and a Graduating Students Survey from 1979, Endo and Harpel (1982) examined the impact of student-faculty interaction on students' academic and intellectual outcomes. The results confirmed that student-faculty interaction had a significant impact on personal and social as well as intellectual outcomes and on satisfaction with the educational experience. In another study, Mahler et al. (2018) conceptualized teachers' impact on students' performance in terms of the teacher's self-efficacy, subject-specific enthusiasm, and overall enthusiasm for teaching. In a sample of 48 biology teachers and 1,036 of their students, paper tests revealed a significant positive relationship between student performance and teacher subject-specific enthusiasm while contradicting the widely held belief that student performance depends on teacher self-efficacy.

5.3 Discussion of Q2: External Factors that Significantly Impact Female Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE

5.3.1 Location of the Institute

This factor captures how the institute's location impacts female enrollment or the decision to withdraw. Location is an important factor because some female students do not drive or do not have a car. In the interviews, a majority of female students (current, graduates, withdrawn, and failed) mentioned that the institute is located a long way from their place of residence. Most of the interviewees lived in distant areas of Al Ain (e.g. um Ghafa, Al Foah, Al Goa'), and the journey to and from the institute was an obstacle for some. For example, WD1 said "I live far away … in Um Ghafa, [so] it takes an hour to get to the institute." C4, who lived in Um Ghafa, said she came to the institute by car, and the road was very long. C6 said that because the institute was far away, she sometimes traveled by bus and sometimes with her friend.

WG1 withdrew from the institute because of the distance; "Before I got married, I was studying at Al Khawarizmi college in Al Markhaniya because it was near me. After I got married, I moved to Ghaneema, so the institute was now far away, and I was pregnant. The distance was [too] long, so I stopped." In short, she withdrew when she moved to another place. Conversely, some students choose to study at the institute because it is nearby. For instance, FA1 chose the institute because it was easier to get to, as there were no other colleges or universities close to her home. The same was true of students like WG2, who lived in Al Qattara, which is 10 minutes from the institute. In these cases, location was a motivating factor rather than a barrier.

Traffic was also a significant factor for students who had to leave home very early to compensate for the time spent in traffic jams. As C1 put it, "I used to come to the institute by car, but I needed to wake up early because sometimes the road is crowded." C3 learned to drive and obtained a license because she did not want to travel to the institute by bus. The institute was some distance from her previous home, and that distance increased when she moved to another area. She secured a driver's license to make it easier to get to the institute, although the road was often crowded.

WD3 withdrew from the institute because she had to leave home early and got back late: “We were three students living in the same area, and we used to go by bus. We had to wake up very early because the bus passed at 6 or 7 in the morning.” The bus took Al Goa area students (usually few numbers) and they had to pass through Al Wagan, Keryah, and sometimes Al Dhaher to pick other students on their way which takes a very long time to arrive at the institute. WD3 said “We didn’t see our parents because we also got home late. That’s why I have stopped—the distance to the institute is too far.” The institute’s location also caused some students to withdraw because they were unable to attend some courses. As WD2 said, “I live far away … in Um Al Ghafa, so it takes an hour to get to the institute.” Many of the interviewed students said that the drive to the institute was too long. A majority of interviewees complained about the long drive to the institute, and location was one of the most important factors in deciding to enroll or withdraw. The present findings align with earlier studies, such as Kane and Frazee (1978), which also identified location as a major problem.

Culture also affects the enrollment decisions of female students, as many Emirati families do not allow females to obtain a driving license. According to Egun and Tibi (2010), women in Gulf countries are often married off young, and their household roles and responsibilities limit the time they might otherwise have spent traveling to and from the institute, especially if they have young children to care for. As most of the female students did not drive or own a car, they relied heavily on public transportation provided by the institute.

A majority of the interviewed students expressed concern about living too far from the institute; some complained about the distance, even though it took only 15 or 20 minutes to get there. For some who lived near the institute, their travel time was extended because the bus had to pick up other students from their houses. Some students lived in distant areas like Al Goa’ and Al Wagan, and because of their low numbers, the bus had to visit other areas to reach full capacity. Eventually, students from these places typically withdrew, either because the policy stated that the bus had to be full or because of the long distance and consequent exhaustion. This was a challenging issue for the institute, and at the time, the only solution offered was to comply with the policy of using the bus’s full capacity. To solve this problem, students had to either own or rent a

car (which some did for a time) or be driven to the institute by a family member. Again, cultural barriers were at play here, as some of these families did not have a driver. In addition, some families did not want their daughters to drive or to be alone with a male driver, especially when the distance was long. No staff member mentioned this issue, even though students repeatedly reported it to the student services department. A possible explanation is that responsibility for transportation is assigned to the operations department rather than to student services. As a member of the administrative staff, the researcher is familiar with this issue, which has been highlighted by a number of worried parents. Parents inquired repeatedly about how their daughters would get to and from the institute, noting that public universities like UAEU and ZU provide transportation for all students across the country.

Even in the absence of these cultural issues, socioeconomic constraints also played a pivotal role; for example, financial constraints might limit the ability to hire a driver, rent or buy a car, or obtain a license. In a study investigating whether costs (including transportation costs) affect enrollment decisions, Tuckman (1973) found that middle-income families achieved the greatest savings from proximity to a local college. Proximity to a local college also increases enrollment rates among low-income students; for instance, Eliasson (2006) reported that enrollment increases with local access to university education. A comparison of two-year and four-year colleges suggests that the latter are more immune to tuition/income ratio and distance-related costs than the former, perhaps because of the impact of student socioeconomic status on enrollment decisions (Ordovensky, 1995).

According to Christensen et al. (1975), fewer females than males attend college if there is no local university campus. Stone-Moye (2021) cited transportation as one of the barriers to college attendance, especially for those living in rural areas, and as a significant predictor of enrollment decisions: “Applicants who live within a 15-mile radius of the main campus are 93% less likely to enroll than applicants who live within a 10-mile radius.” Slim et al. (2018) provided further confirmation that place of residence is a factor in enrollment, as applicants who reside in a university or college city are more likely to enroll there.

5.3.2 Purpose of Studying

For the purposes of the present analysis, it is critical to first understand students' reasons for studying at the institute. In this regard, a majority used the word "work"—that is, they enrolled at the institute in the hope of finding work after graduation. Regardless of why they might want a particular job, these women wanted to be financially self-sufficient, either by getting a job or by running their own business. For example, during the interview, C1 said that she was looking for a job in the public sector and would apply to the private sector if she did not find one.

While C2 also said that she had no specific reason for studying, getting a degree would help her to jumpstart her career and her future, and most of the interviewed students had the same mindset. C2 said "I learned about the institute from my sister. She said that a new employee at her workplace had graduated from the institute with an EHS major and that maybe I would also find a job at one of the schools if I studied there." C2 was eager to finish her diploma even though she was aware that it was less widely recognized than other certificates and that it might be seen as equivalent to a high school certificate. In short, her main reason for studying at the institute was to find a job.

Many female students also wanted to pursue a career that they were passionate about. C5 wanted to serve her country after finishing her studies by working for a good employer; although she majored in accounting, she did not want to work for a bank. Some planned to save money to start a business. For example, C4 said "I like photography very much; I may open a photography company." A number of students said they had applied to the institute because they wanted to develop as a person. C5 claimed that she enjoyed developing by taking different courses at the Family Centre and obtaining the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) and a sustainability certificate at Al Ain. WG3 also pursued personal development by taking courses in accounting, business, and social skills.

Some students had ambitious aspirations. WD2 wanted to complete her studies to fulfill her dream of becoming a history teacher. She was very flexible and liked cooperating with her classmates. In group work, she liked to be the leader, assigning roles to group members. She also liked to socialize, discover new things, and experience

adventures. WG3's ambition was to complete her bachelor's degree at some point in the future. She also wanted to start her own business and travel around the world. WD3 had hoped to return to her studies during the online learning phase, but learning had by then returned to normal. As one of the students who chose their major on the basis of labor market needs, she wanted to study EHS because of the high demand for that qualification.

Some of the interviewed students wanted to complete their studies at the institute by enrolling in an advanced diploma course. C4 said that if she applied to a university, they would not offer equivalency for the subjects she took, and she wanted to work for the Sewerage Company or Al Ain Municipality. FA1 said she had returned to complete her studies because she could not find a job after leaving the institute. Most of those who had withdrawn were looking for a job at the time of the interview, and a majority, including WD1, said they intended to continue studying if they did not find one. Some students wanted to continue their studies to complete a higher degree; WG1 registered at the institute because it seemed easier than university. Others, like WG2, planned to continue their studies only if they failed to get a job. In general, regardless of their age, all of the interviewed students understood the importance of education in today's world.

Some students offered suggestions about how to encourage more students to enroll in the institute. C2 suggested that the term "institute" should be changed because all higher education institutions (even the private ones) are referred to as either "college" or "university." In her view, students perceive institutes as offering only short courses, such as IELTS, rather than diplomas. They should feel proud to be graduates of the institute. C5 also encouraged students to study at the institute. Some students like C3 encouraged people to register if their circumstances permitted. C4 suggested that girls who could not find anywhere to study would find the institute was a good choice because it would strengthen their English language, provide with free education and offer majors that are needed in the labor market.

For most of the interviewed students, the goal was to get a job by the time they graduated. Staff opinions varied in this regard; some believed that a high proportion of the institute's graduates would get a job. AM stated that vocational training made

graduates more employable, mainly because there was greater demand for vocational competencies in the local labor market. H1 felt that employment depended on the available vacancies and the effort invested in looking for a job. A1 insisted that job opportunities for graduates depended on their skills rather than what they studied and that they could not expect job security.

One of the main objectives of a vocational training institute is to develop links with industry workplaces. However, it seems that some of the interviewed students had been reluctant to join the institute because friends and relatives who had graduated seemed to be taking a long time to get a job. Regarding this issue, T1 said that the gap between the institute and industry needed to be bridged. T2 raised the point that many graduates of the institute secured jobs that were not related to their majors because they had been trained to be good employees for more than one career.

In general, before enrolling at the institute, students just wanted to obtain a certificate. Once enrolled, however, A3 felt that the institute enhanced students' skills and prepared them for the labor market. She also believed that vocational training students are more valued than university students. T1 said that students' families want them to do something meaningful with their lives, whether through their studies or by pursuing a suitable endeavor, and she believed that students also want to achieve something rather than just staying at home.

Administrative staff differed in their perspectives on the future for students. There is no doubt that everyone wants to find a job after graduating. However, A2 believed that graduates faced challenges because the institute was not yet sufficiently well known. One staff member noted that, unlike other higher education qualifications, certificates accredited by NQA were not widely known or recognized. AM said that students should study for international professional certificates during their studies; for example, accounting students could study for chartered status, and IT students could secure a CCNA. According to A1, students were guaranteed a job if they had a degree or IELTS qualification. In the UAE, although stakeholders praise vocational institute graduates, it seems in reality that there are no secure future jobs for them because partnerships and links with industry have not yet been adequately developed. Nevertheless, it was noted

that high school students became more enthusiastic about enrolling when the institute initiated engineering majors.

Females in the UAE have worked hard to achieve the same status as men in similar roles, and they have succeeded in every profession. Although their perceptions of vocational education shifted after attending one or two courses, female enrollment was lower because of an initial impression that current graduates were having difficulty finding work due to a lack of recognition and accreditation. When students with high aspirations are unable to get into their preferred university and are directed instead to a less recognized institution, they may choose not to enroll. This contributes to the low decrement rate, especially among females, for whom completing higher education from an accredited university is a significant achievement. Female participation in education has increased to some extent in the UAE, but vocational training is still new. Even with government support, women face educational inequities that can be traced to issues of perception, attitude, and lifestyle. In other words, women's skills and occupations are underestimated simply because they are performed by women (Abdulla, 2005).

Current students and graduates confirmed that their fundamental reason for studying was to become financially independent and stable. Regardless of whether they used the word "job," everything they said related to securing a better future for themselves and their families. Some of those who ultimately enrolled in the institute did not register voluntarily, but circumstances directed them toward a vocational education; this did not discourage them from pursuing their studies, bringing them one step closer to achieving their goal.

Vocational education goals are well known to those working in the field and to students who choose this form of education. Some of the key goals that attract students to vocational education include learning about the demands of working life and particular occupations that match their interests and are also in demand, and acquiring the capabilities and competencies needed to secure a job in the future (Billett, 2011). For these reasons, as conveyed to them directly or indirectly by administrative and academic staff, the interviewed students saw vocational training as a pathway to employment.

In addition, women's attitudes are changing. For Emirati women who did not complete high school, their ambition to contribute to the country's economy marks a significant change. Many of the enrolled female students were married and were attempting to balance their personal and domestic lives with their ambitions and goals. This shift in thinking has taken some time to become ingrained in Emirati households, which is one reason for the low female enrollment rates at the institute. In low- and middle-income nations, men are still 75% more likely than women to start a business (Chinen et al., 2017). These and other issues contribute to a decrease in registration rates among the female population, and according to the International Labour Organization (2015), women continue to suffer from high unemployment rates worldwide.

Students' aspirations typically relate directly to securing a job and ensuring a safe future for their family. For females in particular, a job is fundamental to independence. Parents must guide and support their child to pursue their future and encourage them not to give up when redirected to vocational training. According to A3, students who did not have it in their hearts to use their skills and explore the possibilities of vocational education would not have registered at the institute. However, some teachers felt that students were unprepared for life after graduation because the curriculum was not aligned with industry. This gap between the institute's curriculum and the labor market was also noted by T3. Divita (1968) observed that vocational programs do not prepare young people effectively to compete in the work environment. To eliminate stereotypes of vocational education graduates, secondary schools must expand their curricula and integrate vocational teaching. When students are unable to find a job after graduation, their family and friends may also refrain from enrolling at vocational institutes. The MoE is now promoting a range of majors to create opportunities in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and even Al Ain. To ensure that unemployed graduates sitting at home can secure a job, the government has invested 27 billion dirhams in private-sector projects.

5.3.3 School and Previous Enrollment Experiences

The interviewed students expressed mixed opinions when asked about their earlier experiences at school. The sample ranged from outstanding students to those who favored certain subjects. The students' school experiences affected their decision to

study at the institute, which may have been their best option if their high school GPA was low or if they did not get the required IELTS or EmSAT (formerly CEPA). For example, C4 did not take her studies seriously in grade 12 and registered at the institute because her GPA was not high enough to be accepted at the university. Some students were very good at school; among these, WD1 had a GPA of 82%, but she registered at the institute because she failed to secure the required CEPA for university. WG1 finished high school in 2008 and registered at Abu Dhabi University, but she also registered at the institute because she fell below 5 on her IELTS.

Circumstances dictated that some students did less well in high school; for instance, WD3 fell ill during her high school studies with abdominal and eye issues that required surgery. She registered at the institute after hearing about it from her friends as a good option for those who could not find somewhere else to study. C1 enrolled in the engineering major because she liked math, which her teacher made easy. C2 chose to register at the institute because she lacked the required IELTS to continue studying at UAEU.

Almost all the students mentioned the subject "Math" in positive or negative terms. C5 said "The subject I liked most was Geography, and the subject I hated most was Math." WD3 said "I used to like social studies, but Math was very difficult." Despite the perception that the institute attracts only students of average ability, some proved to be distinguished and outstanding students like C6 ("I studied in grade 12, and I was one of the distinguished students") and WG3 ("I was a hard-working student, but I did not work all day; at the end I got 93.3%—for me, it was wow!"). Some students seemed to feel that the institute shaped their personality: "I was shy in school contrary to the institute" (WG1); "I used to hate the school and there was no specific reason" (G1). No single factor linked the students' experiences to their earlier schooling; each interviewee reported a unique trajectory that led them to their favorite subject.

A number of students reported negative experiences in some school subjects while others were more positive. For example, C3 did not like math because the teacher was uncooperative, but other school subjects seemed easy. Among other difficult school experiences, WG3 left the scientific stream after just a week, when she saw that the

teacher was not encouraging her. She switched to the literary stream, but unfortunately found she had the same teacher. Finally, some students reported positive school experiences; among these, FA1 reported that good communication with teachers made school subjects easy, and teachers were helpful.

When students were rejected by other higher educational institutes, this affected their self-esteem and confidence. [T4] said that teachers tried to motivate them by explaining that vocational programs are more practical and hands-on, which had a positive impact. He also said that teachers began to see a difference when students were "acknowledged," and they were more confident when they graduated.

Theories related to "relative deprivation" and "relative gratification" play an essential role in explaining what happens to students with lower self-esteem, as well as to those who gain confidence over time. Relative deprivation refers to how students in a lower track compare themselves to a reference group in a higher track, which adversely affects their motivation and self-esteem. Conversely, relative gratification refers to the positive feelings of higher-performing students when comparing themselves to lower performers (Houtle et al., 2012).

While the interviewed female students varied in this regard, they had one thing in common; they were either average or slightly below average pupils. Most of them seemed to have had a good time at school, but regardless of their school experience or academic level, none of them wanted to stay at home after graduating from high school. Whether by choice or by circumstance, the Emirati female's mindset had changed, and they now wished to be educated and independent contributors to society. In the UAE, education is no longer the exclusive preserve of men and is now supported and pursued by women. This shift took some time but is now the norm in all Emirati households. The next required shift in the educational sector is the accreditation and normalization of vocational education and training institute degrees. Many developing countries now regard vocational training as a key component of the educational system because it prepares students for the workplace and equips them with the necessary skills and instructional materials.

So, if females are keen to complete higher education, why are enrollment rates so low? Because accredited university degrees are considered important, it is understandable that students are likely to apply to well-known and respected institutions. More than half of the UAE workforce comprises either local men or foreigners, who can travel abroad to gain the knowledge and certification they need for specific technical jobs. In many countries, vocational training is seen as a means of providing more jobs for young people, offering them better opportunities and the skills they need to enter the job market and increasing their chances of choosing a suitable career. In the Gulf area, however, even women who gain access to higher education frequently encounter unequal career prospects (Mazawi, 1999).

Vocational training is still relatively new in the UAE, and when considering how best to secure a job in the future, students, particularly females, rarely consider enrolling in a vocational college. Seeing graduates struggle to find work also demoralizes them, and they instantly form a negative view of vocational training institutes, further reducing female enrollment. As discussed by Harkat et al. (2016), the prospect of unemployment seems to be the main driver of interest in vocational training.

5.3.4 Knowing about the Institute

According to AM and others, students hear about the institute through friends and relatives or social media. H1 also believed they heard about the institute through graduate students, posters on social media, and MoE induction, as well as friends and relatives. H2 also confirmed that sources include friends, relatives, and public colleges and universities. A1 referred to the role of school visits, MoE induction, and public vocational training institute staff, as well as friends and relatives. A2 and A3 shared this opinion. A1added “I have never heard a student say that they joined institute because of marketing.” Other sources of knowledge about the institute referred to by T1 include ACTVET programs like Y2W (Yes to Work), which is offered to school students.

Finding out about the institute is a crucial stage in the enrollment process. Among the ways in which prospective students get to know about the institute, the head teachers again referred to the role of family and friends. Some students were directed to the institute from public colleges or through MoE induction. T4 noted that the MoE

promotes various majors and educational institutes according to market requirements. Nevertheless, many UAE nationals still do not know about the institute. T3 observed that this is surprising, as it is a government institute, and he suggested that there should be a marketing department, along with regular industry visits to market the institute's programs. In general, students who hear about the institute from friends or relatives with a good knowledge of such matters may feel more confident about applying (Reis & Kahler, 1997). Any support from family and friends is likely to have a significant impact on the decision to enroll (Houser & Garvey, 1985).

It is widely accepted that the influence of peer groups and friends is a major factor in an individual's socialization and in decisions that alter the course of one's life. Naz et al. (2014) content-analyzed questionnaire data from 100 students to explore how peers and friends influence career decisions. While friends and peers were found to have a significant effect on lifestyle and education choices, parents were the main influence because of their impact on values and personality formation. More specifically, in his study of reference group influence on the educational choices of female students at a private college in the Middle East, Tomeh (1968) reported that family, and especially parents, play a dominant role. In the present case, some members of the administrative staff made the point that the institute was not well known and that prospective students found out about vocational training mainly through family and current students. Despite progress in raising awareness of the institute among high school students, family and friends remain the primary sources of information about the institute.

At present, there are three vocational education and training institutes in two UAE cities. One possible reason for this limited presence is that the institutes get little exposure beyond their immediate locale. Opening further branches across the country would increase accessibility for everyone and especially for female students. To date, there has been relatively little social media coverage of vocational training, which probably limits awareness of the institute among high school graduates. By way of contrast, the United Arab University (the nation's premier institute) has more than 33K followers on its official Instagram handle while the institute currently has about 5K followers.

According to A2, the institute attracts little online interest: “I don’t think anybody searches for us on the Internet—maybe some social media users and some school visits.” This further supports the view that lack of awareness is a major factor in low enrollment rates. The analysis suggests that parents are less willing to enroll their daughters at an unknown vocational and training institute. This is unsurprising in an Arab country, where stricter norms apply to the female population. In the theoretical framework, a recurring theme was that 73% did not have enough knowledge about vocational training in the country and would like to know more (Talarzyk, 1975). This aligns with the present finding that some citizens are unaware of the existence of vocational education and training, which undoubtedly contributes to the decline in female enrollment.

5.4 Discussion of Q3: How do Participants Think Female Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training Institutes in the UAE can be Increased?

A majority of the interviewed students and some staff members identified inflexible timetables as a demotivating factor for students who complained that this was like a “school system.” Indeed, one member of staff suggested that students sometimes felt that they were “treated like high school students.” On first arriving at the institute, students compared their own previous college experiences or those of their relatives and friends. As most of them were older than the typical first-year student, they expected to be treated as independent adults, especially as many were employed, married, or single mothers with children or had more responsibilities as the eldest in their family. They often had other commitments, such as attending hospital appointments for themselves or their family members, training for a driving license, attending court, or volunteering. In light of this seniority, one student suggested changing the term “institute” to “college.”

This comparison also informed students’ perceptions of the majors offered, as availability depended on the number of enrolling students. Majors such as “event management” and “IT multimedia” were no longer available, and the institute was seen to compare unfavorably with other colleges and universities that offered a wide choice of specializations regardless of student numbers. Students also felt that a lot of specialization currently in demand in the labor market was not offered at the institute. One member of staff claimed that students were “looking for a major that has more

future opportunities" while another suggested that future jobs for graduates were not "certain." Students and staff probably arrived at this conclusion on the basis of their interactions with institute graduates in their circle of friends and relatives.

It is worth noting that a search of the NQA website found no dedicated section on changing labor market needs for particular specializations and competencies. Access to knowledge of that kind would help staff and students to understand how vocational training institutes decide on specialized offerings. Such transparency would also improve staff and student trust in both the NQA and the institute.

Some staff members also raised the issue of career advice. Because students typically lack the tools to evaluate their own characteristics, competencies, and abilities, they are likely to choose a specialization that does not suit them. The multiple ensuing challenges may cause them to change or withdraw from their course of study. On arriving at the institute, many students lacked the requisite EmSAT or IELTS and were therefore enrolled in the English Foundation Program to strengthen their English language skills and secure the necessary scores. Some staff referred to the need for teachers to offer "career counseling" at this stage, as they interacted with the students every day and so knew them well. That being so, it would also be helpful to prepare teachers for that task and to provide them with the tools needed to perform it effectively.

Some staff believed that the English language barrier prevented some students from continuing their studies—despite being entirely capable of comprehending and applying subject knowledge— if they were unable to secure the necessary EmSAT or IELTS scores. It was suggested that these students should be offered Arabic language programs. In support of these suggestions, it was argued that vocational jobs require only basic English because they involve mainly manual tasks.

Most staff members and students referred to the quality of campus life, including building design, hygiene, atmosphere, the range of food offered in the canteen, and extra-curricular activities. Students preferred the wider spaces and aesthetics of the new building that the institute moved to around 2017; those who withdrew before that time said they did not like the older building. Both students and staff favored a greater range of food options, more activities and open days, and a dedicated space for recreation.

One major concern for some students and staff was the issue of equivalency. Students and graduates in particular questioned whether they could complete their bachelor degrees and whether the subjects they took would have MoE equivalency, allowing them to shorten the period of study for a degree. A higher degree was considered important, both for academic progress and in order to secure a highly paid job. It was suggested that an agreement should be reached with local universities to resolve this issue.

Some administrative staff expressed the view that it was important to offer students an opportunity to acquire international certificates (such as CCNA) before they graduated. They pointed out that most colleges and vocational training institutes around the world have adopted this practice, as it consolidates students' specialized expertise and improves the attractiveness of their job portfolios for the labor market.

As most students believed that they first heard about the institute from relatives and friends—a view supported by some staff—it was suggested that marketing should be strengthened by organizing more visits to industries and organizations. Most staff members referred to the importance of partnerships with public and private sector organizations, which would enable the institute to tailor its courses and programs to meet labor market needs, secure jobs for graduates, and offer scholarships to encourage students to continue and complete their studies.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain an insight into the lived experiences and enrollment decisions of female students at a government vocational education and training institute in the UAE. The study also explored the perspectives of teachers and administrators working at the same institute. As mentioned at the beginning of the dissertation and documented in the literature, vocational training has been ongoing since human beings first began to use tools to earn a living. However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that researchers began to observe, document, discuss, and evaluate these activities.

As the study employed a phenomenological approach, it was imperative to combine a thorough literature review of related topics with an empirical survey of students and staff to capture the uniqueness of the participants' lived experiences within the real-world context of the institute in question. As they unfolded, these lived experiences and their multiple associated realities afforded rich opportunities for exploration. The study findings reveal an array of external and internal factors that affect female enrollment at vocational institutes in the UAE. Internal factors include campus environment, learning experiences, and relationships with administrators and instructors; external factors include knowledge about the institute, location, previous school and enrollment experiences, and reasons for studying.

Figure 11 shows that some of the emerging themes occurred more frequently than others. Appendix C details the frequency of occurrence of all 49 themes. For clarity, themes that occurred six times or less were eliminated from the graph. The first theme that registered 19 occurrences in the three files related to how students came to know about the institute (through word of mouth from family or friends; from staff at the institute or at other educational institutes; and from traditional Majlis, where (mostly) males gathered and conveyed the information to their families.

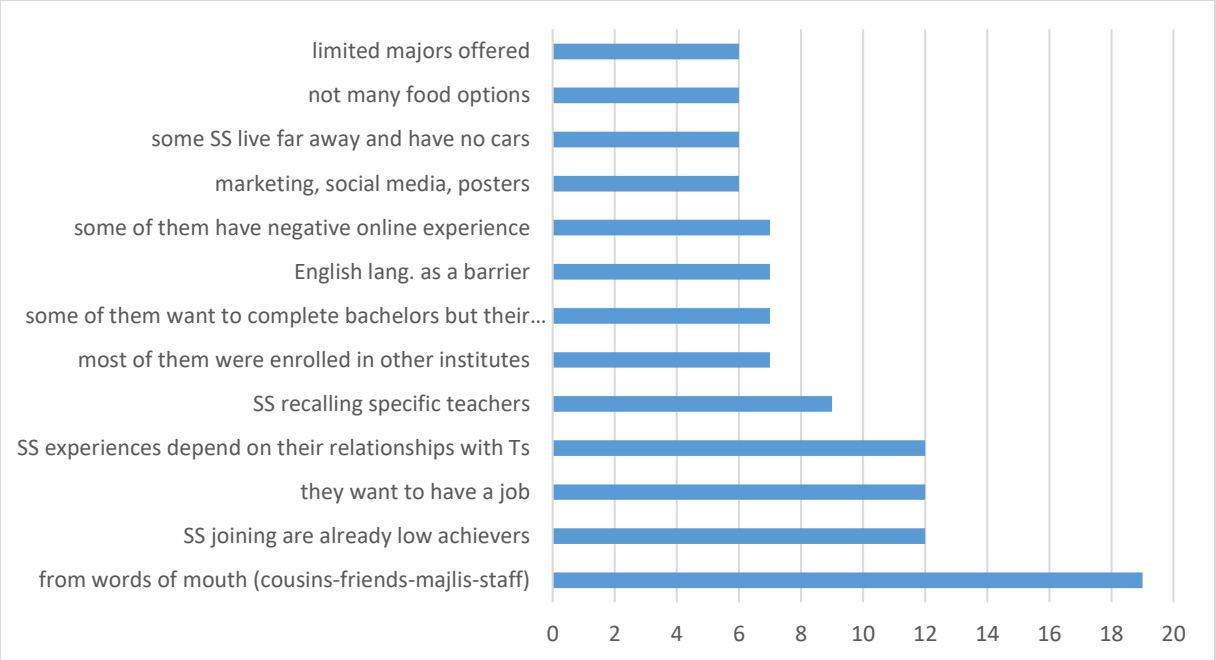

Figure 11: Frequency of Theme Occurrence

The second set of themes registering a similar number of occurrences (12) included the following: students joining the institute are already low achievers; their reason for studying is to secure a job; and their relationships with instructors and administrators have a significant impact on their learning experiences. Whether they said it directly or not, most of the interviewed staff members and students agreed that most of those who enroll at the institute are low achievers. This is supported by the fact that the institute's admission criteria are more flexible than those of other government colleges and universities. Students' primary reason for enrolling was to secure a job, and this aligns with the main objective of government vocational institutes: to establish VETAC, NQA, and ACTVET standards under this umbrella (National Qualifications Authority, 2018). The essential question was whether these organizations had actually reduced youth unemployment, and there is scope for further research in this regard.

As one of the main objectives of a vocational training organization is to develop links with industry employers, students were likely to be less inclined to enroll when they realized that friends or relatives who graduated from the institute had waited a long time to get a job. Almost all of the students shared the same mindset; they wanted to get a degree that would help them to jumpstart their career and their future. The interviews confirmed that most of the students who had withdrawn were currently looking for a job, and a majority intended to continue studying if they did not find one.

Some students and staff also shared the view that students' relationships with instructors and administrative staff had a significant impact on their learning experiences—a point reinforced by a few repeated references to instructors by name. Although this did not seem to be a major factor in the low female enrollment rates, it may have increased student engagement and participation levels following enrollment and during their studies. It is also important to note that the institute needs positive endorsements, and even one neglected instance of negative feedback could become a major issue. In general, it seems clear that the student learning experience depends mainly on the quality of student-teacher relationships.

Another recurring theme was that most of the female students had previously enrolled at another educational institute. In many cases, they reported negative

experiences of rejection that undoubtedly had a psychological impact on their expectations and self-esteem. Other intrinsic and extrinsic factors came into play here, as students who persisted and completed their studies had more life experience and more supportive teachers, friends, and family, as well as positive innate characteristics and psychological elements.

A further set of significant recurring themes included a desire to complete the bachelor degree, the English language as a perceived barrier to course completion, negative online learning experiences, transportation issues among those living at a distance from the institute, limited food options in the canteen, and the limited range of majors offered by the institute.

It is important to note that if current students shared their negative experiences with potential students, this would almost certainly discourage enrollment and may contribute to the low levels of female enrollment at educational and training institutions. For example, negative feelings were expressed about the institute's physical structure, as well as study hours, inflexible timetables, strict procedures for leaving the campus, and failure to take account of students' circumstances. For female students, it was important to be able to choose their own timetables, especially in the case of married and employed students.

In relation to the above themes, it is important to remember that phenomenological research is less about recurring themes than about unique themes that represent the individual's singular reality. For example, one of the teachers referred to how one student changed her major because of her father's concern that she might not secure a job. As defined by Evans (2006), gender autonomy pertains to the ability, regardless of gender, to choose a career path without incurring a social or material disadvantage or penalty. This also applies to females and males who make atypical career choices.

In conclusion, as explained in Chapter 3, social constructivism acknowledges the individual's subjective understanding of the world in which they live. It follows that each female student and staff member has her own reality and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This makes qualitative research findings (and certainly

phenomenological findings) difficult to generalize. Nevertheless, the value of this approach is that it enables us to explore unique individual experiences and delve deep into underlying meanings and implications.

5.6 Implications and Recommendations

As elaborated by Becker (2009), human capital theory identifies vocational education and training as the most important investment in human capital. Another core framework that informs the present research is gender equality theory, which prompted the researcher's interest in the status of women in general and Emirati women in particular. This in turn inspired the pursuit of further insights into the deep layers of women's unique experiences and the reasons for their attraction to or alienation from the institute, as well as their aspirations and the challenges they faced during their educational journey before or during their time at the institute.

In general, although students' perceptions of vocational education shifted once they had attended one or two courses, it was their initial impressions that caused female enrollment rates to fall. In particular, they saw the employment challenges faced by current graduates because of a lack of recognition and accreditation. For that reason, it was recommended that agreements with industry partners should be increased and strengthened to equip graduates with the qualifications, competencies, and skills needed in the labor market and to provide sponsorships and secure jobs for the future. Students should also be helped to obtain international professional certificates during their studies to enrich their learning experiences and increase their employability and opportunities.

It is equally important to implement policies to encourage women to enroll in vocational training programs, such as creating a more flexible work environment that promotes a better work-life balance, ensuring gender equality at the workplace, regulating the specializations and jobs available, and providing incentives and sponsorships for female students. Women's inability to participate in skill training, according to Beegle and Matulevich (2020), is primarily hampered by childcare. Women often shoulder a disproportionate amount of childcare and domestic work in most nations. Women with children under seven were more likely to enroll in the Colombian youth training program once the government began providing childcare subsidies for

daycare at schools. Additionally, women participants had a greater improvement in their employment rates and income as a result of daycare availability than did males. Transportation issues may limit the engagement of women, as seen in the findings. Women are more likely than men to express safety worries about available transportation alternatives while having less money to spend on it. Because of their mobility issues, women are less able to take advantage of educational and employment prospects.

There is also a pressing need for further research as vocational training and education increase in importance and is now a top priority for the UAE government. As the UAE approached its fiftieth-year anniversary, HH Mohammed Rashed bin Al Maktoum published a charter committing the UAE to improve lifelong learning outcomes for all its citizens to ensure that they build continuously their competencies and skills. In the fourth article of the charter, he says "We want an educational system that discovers and develops the talents of every human being. Our goal is lifelong education so that our citizens can constantly develop their abilities and skills to keep pace with the rapid changes that the world will witness during the coming period" (Emirates News Agency, 2022).

The obvious gap in the literature regarding female enrollment in the UAE's vocational training institutes invites new research in this area, as well as replication studies and the validation of existing theories that relate to some of the factors mentioned here. For example, there is a clear need to explore theories that can explain how peers, friends, and family influence students' education and career choices in the context of vocational training institutes. Relevant theoretical constructs include relative deprivation and relative gratification, the frog pond analogy, frames of reference, and so on. Other areas of interest include the impact of family socioeconomic and educational background on students' choices, students' relationships and interactions with their teachers and the impact on academic performance, and the role of gender autonomy in learners' choice of career paths. Above all, finding ways to support low achievers should be a top priority, ensuring that the majority of students who enroll at these institutes can learn from best practices. This will entail a series of initiatives involving replication, experimentation, measurement, and monitoring to modify interventions accordingly.

Finally, as mentioned in chapter three, potential limitations of this study include its theoretical framework, data availability, interview techniques, and the scarcity of previous research on the subject in the context of the United Arab Emirates. Despite being one of the main theoretical frameworks in this study, according to Marginson (2019), it has inherent flaws related to the usage of the closed system model. To add, this study was carried out in a branch of one of the governmental vocational training institutes so other branches were not accessible due to restrictions to students' data. This also applied to the staff interviewed as it was not possible to interview staff from other branches due to time restrictions. Interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic so there was a lack of face-to-face interaction.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Students

(English Version)

1. Preliminary Questions (Contextualization)

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you join/leave the institute, and how did you find out about it/other institutes?
- Were you studying at another educational institute before coming here?
- Do you have relatives or friends who are studying, either here or elsewhere? What do you think of their experiences?

2. Probing Questions (Apprehending the Phenomenon)

   External Factors

   - Is the institute near your residence?
   - How was your academic performance in school?
   - What are your plans for after you finish your studies here?

   Internal Factors

   - What does it feel to study on campus?
   - What do you think about your learning experience on campus?
   - Describe your experiences with your teachers/the student services staff/the administrative staff.

3. More Probing Questions (Clarifying the Phenomenon):

a. Encourage students to talk about their life and learning experiences. If they have family commitment, how do they balance between their studies and their family lives?

b. If there is a couple of years of gap or more, ask more probing questions and encourage them to talk about the reasons and how do they feel about it.

c. Peer pressure have a role in influencing the student decision either to join or withdraw so it is important to know what type experiences that had an impact on their decisions.

d. According to the interviewer's experience, the geographical location may have an impact so it's important to know this information whether it was a reason for enrollment or withdrawal.

e. The student may have either a happy or a negative experience at school that affected their future study decisions so it is important to encourage them to talk about them.

f. Giving students the chance to talk about their study and life future plans will inform the interviewer to know whether they have specific goals or know the purpose of studying the vocational diploma.

g. Sometimes students – especially the shy and quiet ones - do not tell you what they think or what type of experience they have in the campus unless you ask them. Following up with this question, the interviewer could ask questions to elaborate more to know the reasons their particular experience. To probe further, the interviewer could ask the participant about their peers or their classmates experiences.

h. They can also talk about what they think about their peer's or friends' learning experiences.

i. Here the interviewer could dig deeper to know specific factors whether curriculum, teaching style and quality, campus life or policies and the ones implementing them enrich or obstruct their learning experience.

أسئلة المقابلة للطلاب

(النسخة العربية)

1. الأسئلة الأولية (السياق)

- حدثني عن نفسك.

- لماذا انضممت / غادرت المعهد وكيف عرفت عنه / عن المعاهد الأخرى؟

- هل كنت تدرس في معهد تعليمي آخر قبل المجيء إلى هنا؟

- هل لديك أقارب أو أصدقاء يدرسون ، سواء هنا أو في مكان آخر؟ ما رأيك في تجاربهم؟

2. أسئلة استقصائية (إدراك الظاهرة)

- عوامل خارجية:

- هل المعهد قريب من محل إقامتك؟

- كيف كان أدائك الأكاديمي في المدرسة؟

- ما هي خططك بعد الانتهاء من دراستك هنا؟

- العوامل الداخلية:

- ما هو شعورك عند الدراسة في الحرم الجامعي؟

- ما رأيك في تجربة التعلم الخاصة بك في الحرم الجامعي؟

- صِف تجاربك مع معلميك / موظفي خدمات الطلاب / الطاقم الإداري.

3. المزيد من الأسئلة الاستقصائية (توضيح الظاهرة):

أ. شجع الطلاب على التحدث عن حياتهم وخبراتهم التعليمية. إذا كان لديهم التزام عائلي ، كيف يوازنون بين دراستهم وحياتهم الأسرية؟

ب. إذا كانت هناك فجوة لمدة عامين أو أكثر، فاطرح المزيد من الأسئلة الاستقصائية وشجعهم على التحدث عن الأسباب وكيف يشعرون حيال ذلك.

ج. يلعب ضغط الأقران دورًا في التأثير على قرار الطالب إما بالانضمام أو الانسحاب ، لذلك من المهم معرفة نوع التجارب التي كان لها تأثير على قراراتهم.

د. وفقًا لتجربة القائم بإجراء المقابلة ، قد يكون للموقع الجغرافي تأثير لذلك من المهم معرفة هذه المعلومات سواء كانت سببًا للتسجيل أو الانسحاب.

ه. قد يكون للطالب تجربة سعيدة أو سلبية في المدرسة أثرت على قرارات دراستهم المستقبلية لذا من المهم تشجيعهم على التحدث عنها.

و. إن إعطاء الفرصة للطالب للتحدث عن خطط دراستهم وحياتهم المستقبلية سيُعلم المحاور ما إذا كانت لديهم أهداف محددة أو معرفة الغرض من دراسة الدبلوم المهني.

ز. في بعض الأحيان ، لا يخبرك الطلاب - وخاصة الخجولون والهادئون - بما يفكرون به أو نوع الخبرة التي لديهم في الحرم الجامعي ما لم تسألهم. متابعة هذا السؤال يمكن للمحاور طرح أسئلة لتوضيح المزيد لمعرفة أسباب تجربتهم الخاصة. لمزيد من التحقيق ، يمكن للمحاور أن يسأل المشاركين عن تجارب أقرانهم أو زملائهم في الفصل.

ح. يمكنهم أيضًا التحدث عما يفكرون فيه بشأن تجارب التعلم الخاصة بأقرانهم أو أصدقائهم.

(هنا يمكن للقائم بإجراء المقابلة التعمق لمعرفة عوامل محددة سواء كانت المناهج الدراسية أو أسلوب التدريس وجودته أو الحياة في الحرم الجامعي أو السياسات وأولئك الذين يطبقونها وهل هذه التجارب تثري أو تعرقل تجربة التعلم الخاصة بهم).

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Staff

(English Version)

1. **Preliminary Questions (Contextualization)**

Have you worked for other organizations before coming here, or is this your first job experience?

- What was your major at the university?

2. **Probing Questions (Apprehending the Phenomenon)**

   External Factors

   - How do you think applicants find out about the institute?
   - How would you describe their academic performance? Do you think that this affects their choice of which educational institutes to pursue?
   - Who do you think is affecting their educational choices?
   - Do you think that these students will have a secure career in the future? Why?

   Internal Factors

   - How do you think students feel about their overall experience at the institute?
   - What do you think their learning experience on campus is like?
   - What do you think about students' relationships with their teachers, the student services staff, and the administration staff?

3. **More Probing Questions (Clarifying the Phenomenon).**

a. Staff choice of study could determine their background and perspectives and this has an impact in the way they communicate with students. Here the interviewer could probe more to know their previous learning experiences which may has an impact on the way the see learning and learners.

b. Staff have knowledge about the students' academic performance background through their communication with the applicants and community in addition to the process of channeling specific types of learners.

c. It is important to know points of view of staff working at vocational training institutes because this affects their communication styles and their level of understanding to those types of students.

d. Staff have accumulated feedback from students especially career advisors and graduate affair staff as they know through their interactions with graduates.

e. With regards to the question related to student's overall experience, this is an interesting question as the staff may have a different understanding from the students because as I mentioned before, many students do not express openly about their opinions with the staff.

أسئلة المقابلة للموظفين

(النسخة العربية)

1. الأسئلة الأولية (السياق):

- هل عملت في منظمات أخرى قبل المجيء إلى هنا ، أم أن هذه هي تجربتك الوظيفية الأولى؟

- ما هو تخصصك في الجامعة؟

2. أسئلة استقصائية (إدراك الظاهرة):

- عوامل خارجية:

- في رأيك كيف يتعرف المتقدمون على المعهد؟

- كيف تصف أدائهم الأكاديمي؟ هل تعتقد أن هذا يؤثر على اختيارهم للمؤسسات التعليمية التي يجب متابعتها؟

- من تعتقد أنه يؤثر على اختياراتهم التعليمية؟

- هل تعتقد أن هؤلاء الطلاب سيكون لديهم وظيفة آمنة في المستقبل؟ لماذا ا؟

- العوامل الداخلية:

- ما رأيك في شعور الطلاب تجاه تجربتهم الكلية في المعهد؟

- ما رأيك في تجربة التعلم في الحرم الجامعي؟

- ما رأيك في علاقات الطلاب مع معلميهم وموظفي خدمات الطلاب وموظفي الإدارة؟

3. المزيد من الأسئلة الاستقصائية (توضيح الظاهرة).

أ. يمكن أن يحدد اختيار الموظفين للدراسة خلفيتهم ووجهات نظرهم وهذا له تأثير في طريقة تواصلهم مع الطلاب. هنا يمكن للمحاور أن يبحث أكثر لمعرفة خبراتهم التعليمية السابقة والتي لها تأثير على نظرتهم للتعلم والمتعلمين.

ب. لدى الموظفون معرفة حول خلفية الأداء الأكاديمي للطلاب من خلال تواصلهم مع المتقدمين للدراسة والمجتمع بالإضافة إلى عملية التسجيل من المؤسسات الأخى والتي تتضمن توجيه أنواع معينة من المتعلمين للإنخراط بالدراسة في المؤسسة تحت قيد الدراسة.

ج. من المهم معرفة وجهات نظر الموظفين العاملين في معاهد التدريب المهني لأن هذا يؤثر على أساليب الاتصال ومستوى فهمهم لتلك الأنواع من الطلاب.

د. يقوم الموظفون بتجميع ملاحظات من الطلاب وخاصة المستشارين المهنيين وموظفي شؤون الخريجين من خلال تفاعلهم مع الخريجين.

ه. فيما يتعلق بالسؤال المتعلق بالتجربة الإجمالية للطالب ، هذا سؤال مثير للاهتمام حيث قد يكون لدى الموظفين فهم مختلف عن الطلاب لأنه كما ذكرت من قبل ، لا يعبر العديد من الطلاب بشكل صريح عن آرائهم مع الموظفين.

Appendix C

Number of Themes Occurrences

Name	No. of files	No. of Occurrences
External factors		
1. knowing about the institute		
from words of mouth (cousins-friends-majlis-staff)	3	19
marketing should be more	2	2
marketing, social media, posters	3	6
there was marketing dept. before	1	1
location		
crowded roads	1	1
some SS live far away and have no cars	1	6
they do not prefer using the bus	1	1
previous school and enrolment experience		
most of them were enrolled in other institutes	2	7
some A & T say SS improve once they progress at the institute	2	3
SS joining are already low achievers	3	12
purpose of studying		
career advising - Ts need to know how to advice SS of majors	2	2
certificates are not enough they should improve their skills regardless of their majors	1	2
family, friends affect SS choices	1	2
some of them want to complete bachelors but their subjects are not equalized-not accredited	3	7
some of them want to have their own business	1	2
they want to have a job	3	12
Internal factors		
campus environment		
crowded canteen	1	1
flexibility of rules and policies	2	4
lack of recreational activities	2	2
new building is tidy clean-old building is old and abandoned	1	4
not many food options	2	6
strictness in leaving the institute procedures	1	2
learning experiences		
dealing with male teachers	1	1
English lang. as a barrier	3	7
inflexible TT	3	4

limited majors offered	3	6
positive experience of family and friends have an impact on students' learning experience	1	4
positive learning environment	1	1
practical learning is a factor in SS experience	2	2
some of them have negative online experience	2	7
some students are proud of their majors, EHS, TLA	1	2
SS positive online experience	3	3
strict with attendance	2	3
system like school	3	3
Ts role in SS interest in majors	1	2
relationship with admin and instructors		
admin strictness with SS	3	3
appreciate treating them like adults	3	4
misbehaved students and lenient teachers	2	2
positive experience with admin-Ts	1	2
SS demanding and want more and contact Ts all the time (night) esp during online	2	3
SS experiences depend on their relationships with Ts	3	12
SS recalling specific teachers	1	9
SS relationship with T and A is variant	2	3
SS taking advantage of Ts	2	3
using technology like WhatsApp to communicate	1	1
suggestions		
changing the institute name	1	1
international certificates	1	2
offering programs in mother lang.	2	2
importance of industrial partnerships	1	2

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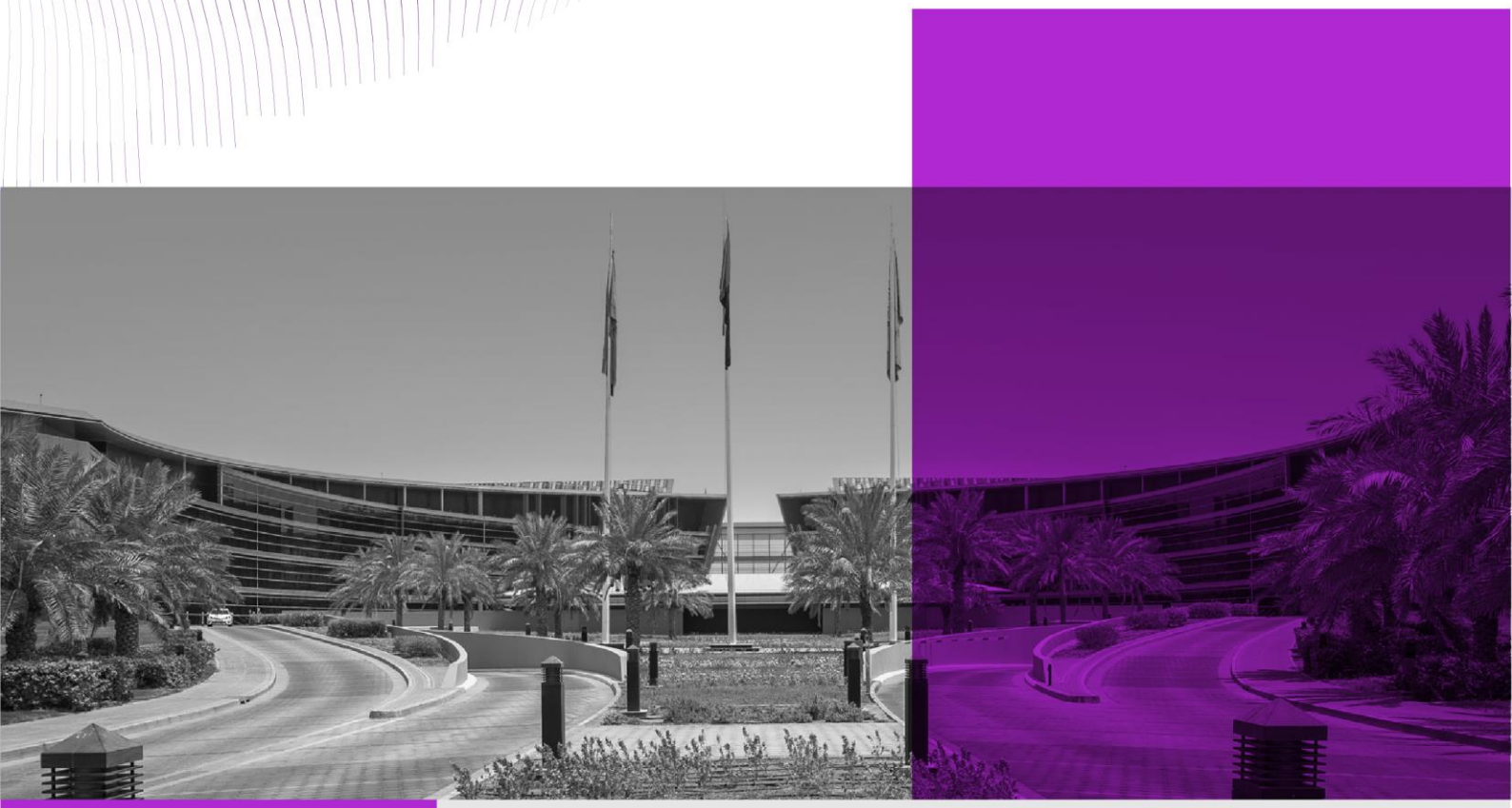

UAE UNIVERSITY DOCTORATE DISSERTATION NO. 2022:29

Great emphasis is placed on the vocational sector and its role in establishing a knowledge-based economy in the UAE. This phenomenological qualitative study explores the external and internal factors that particularly impact female students' enrollment rates in one of the UAE's vocational education and training institutes.

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