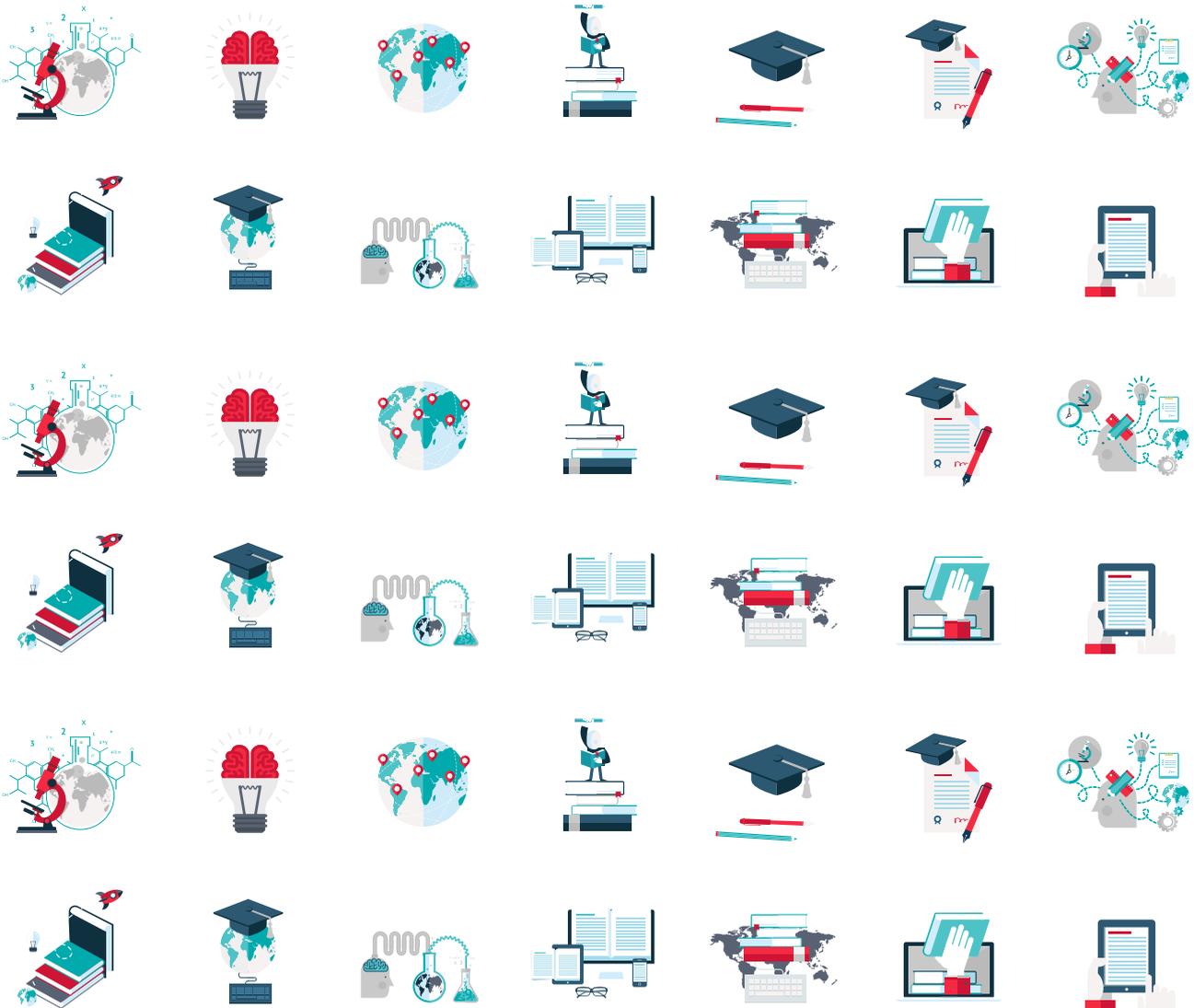




Providing Equal Opportunities

FOR YOUTH IN THE WESTERN REGION



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This report was authored by Sarah Shaer and Engy Osman

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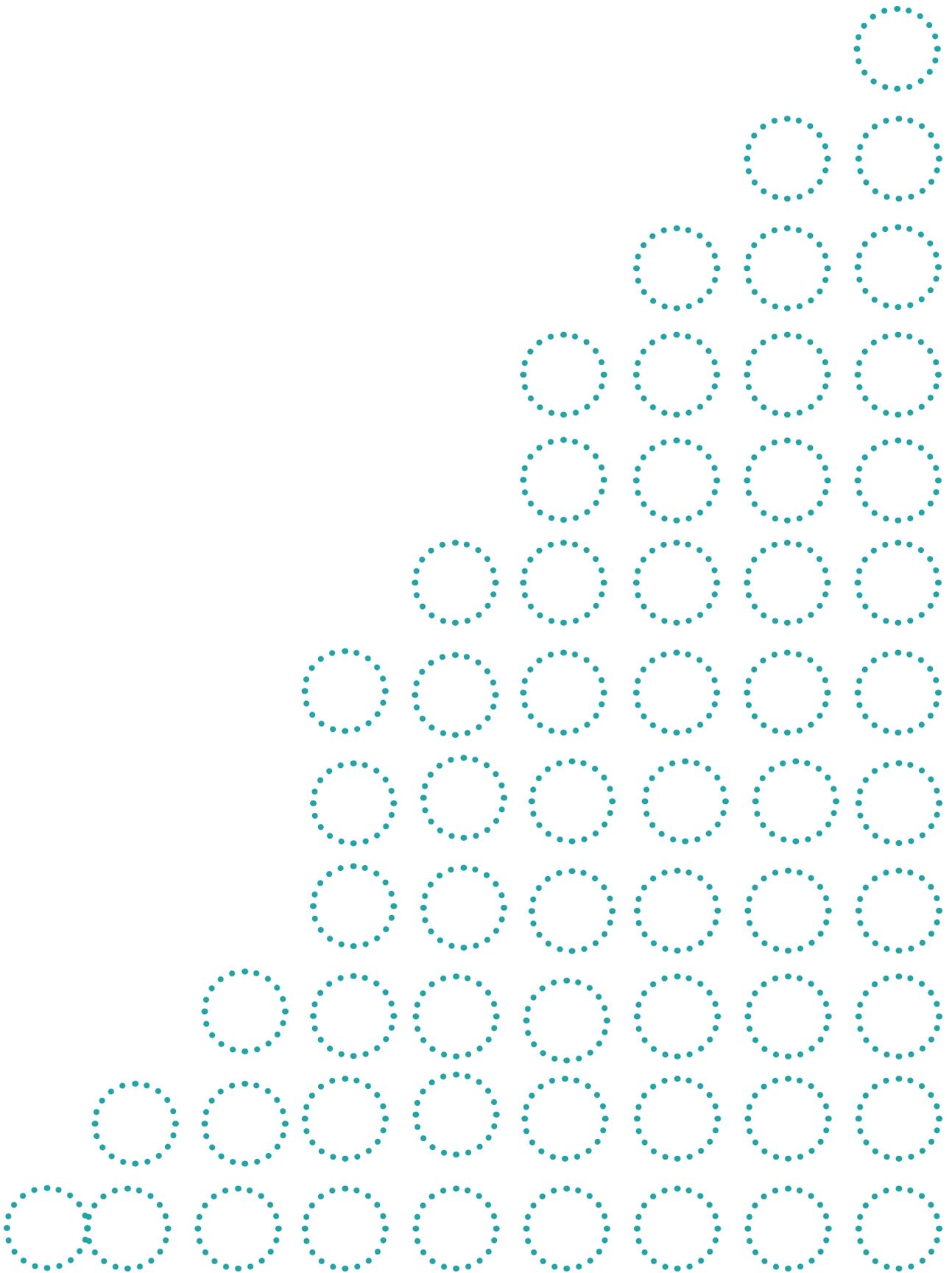
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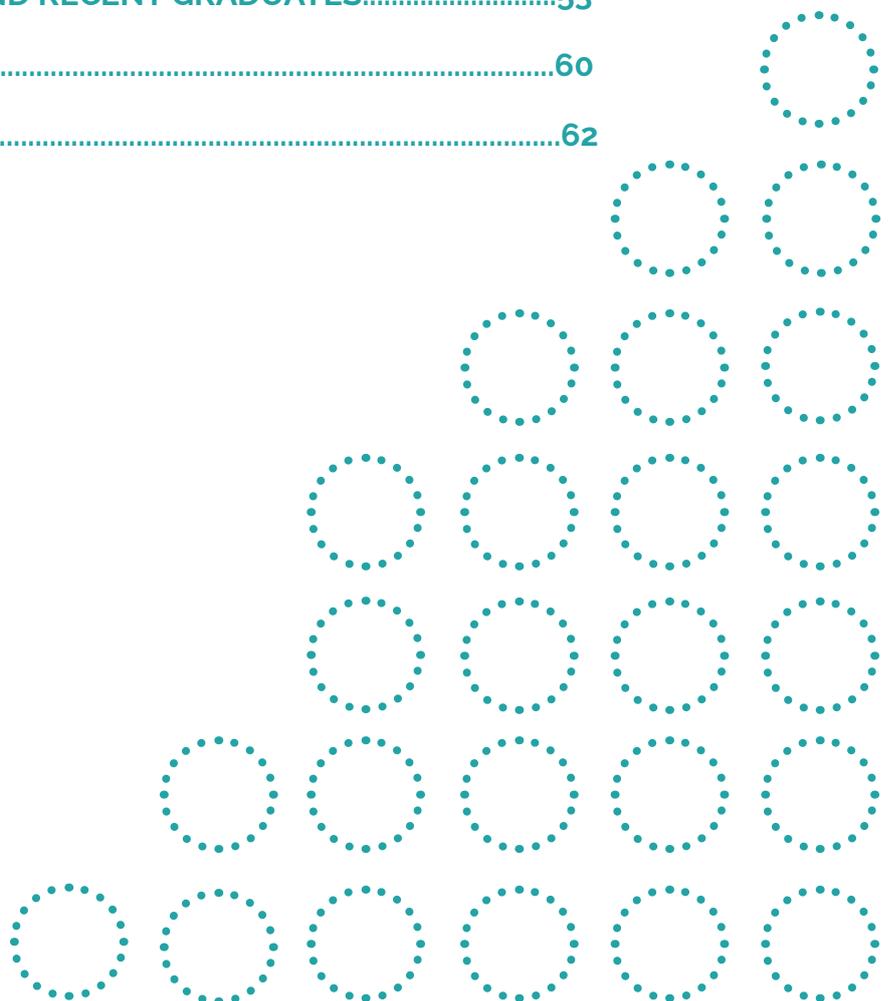


GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation/Acronym	Definition
ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
ADWEA	Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority
DED	Department of Economic Development
FDF	Family Development Fund
RRC	Ruler's Representative Court
SCAD	Statistics Center of Abu Dhabi
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Math
UPC	Urban Planning Council
WRDC	Western Region Development Council
WRM	Western Region Municipality

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rural and remote areas face special education and employment challenges that differ from those facing their urban counterparts. Distance from urban centers, small populations, and special demographic characteristics provide unique challenges in need of creative solutions.

The Western Region of Abu Dhabi, or Al Gharbia, is located 150-300 kms away from the city of Abu Dhabi. It accounts for 71% of the Emirate's land mass but only 9% of its population. As such, the area is considered relatively remote, with scattered settlements and low population densities. While the region has seen considerable development over the past decade, the challenges that it faces due to its location extend to education and employment as well.

The Emirates Foundation, in partnership with the Citi Foundation, initiated this research project to explore the barriers and facilitators to education and employment among Emirati youth in the region with the express aim to develop recommendations to tackle these challenges.

In order to better understand the special context of the region and the challenges faced by its youth, the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, conducted qualitative and quantitative studies among Emiratis aged 16-29 in the region in the form of in-depth interviews and surveys.

Selected Findings

Attitudes toward university education

By and large, students had very positive attitudes toward education and higher educational attainment. Factors such as parental emphasis on education and parental engagement with children significantly influenced student attitudes toward higher education. Positive attitudes were correlated with intent to pursue a higher degree.

Perceptions of accessibility of university education

Perceptions of the accessibility and convenience of attaining a higher degree were significantly correlated with student intention to apply to university. Here again, there was a significant relationship between parental involvement and encouragement and students' perceptions of their abilities to overcome challenges related to educational access.

Satisfaction with quality of high school education

Satisfaction with the quality of high school education impacted not only student attitudes toward education, whereby higher satisfaction lead to improved attitudes, but also students' confidence and expectation of success. Students who thought more highly of their school curricula and their teachers, were more likely to value their education and to be able to imagine succeeding academically. These two factors were significantly correlated with intention to apply to university.

Parental Involvement

Parental engagement was one of the most important factors influencing student perceptions. Students with involved parents valued their education more, expected to succeed more and showed more confidence in their ability to find employment. Parental involvement was significantly correlated with the intention to apply to university.

Factors influencing choice to apply to university

65% of respondents indicated that they intend to apply to university. The factors that were most influential in students' choices to apply were those related to job opportunities, self development and social status. Data from our interviews suggests that youth in the Western Region see education as a way to fulfill their potentials and to achieve a kind of modernity. Enhancing one's ability to give back to the community was also seen as an influential reason to pursue higher education.

Intention to seek employment

61% of respondents intended to seek employment in the future. The preferred sectors among youth in the Western Region were 1. oil and gas, 2. national defense, 3. healthcare and pharmaceuticals, 4.

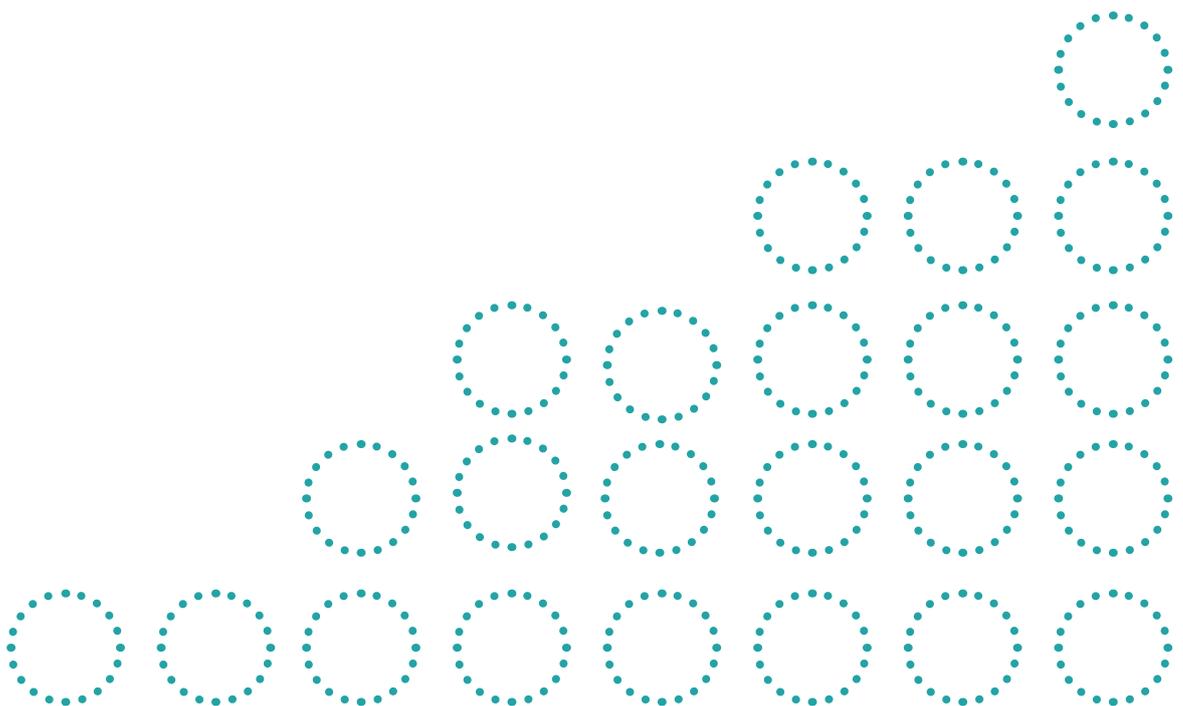
construction and engineering, and 5. public services and government administration.

Perceptions of the private and public sectors

By and large, there was agreement that public sector jobs were more stable and more flexible than private sector jobs and that it is easier to get promoted in the government sector than the private sector. The private sector was also viewed to be a difficult sector for women to work in and one that is somewhat incompatible with the culture of respondents.

1

AL GHARBIA: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND



OVERVIEW OF THE WESTERN REGION

The Western Region or Al Gharbia is located between 150 and 300 kms from the city of Abu Dhabi and constitutes 71% of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi's land mass. The Western region makes up only 9% of Abu Dhabi's population (Oxford Business Group, 2015), 11% of which are Emirati (DED, 2012). The region consists of seven distinct settlements: (1) Madinat Zayed, (2) Al Ruwais (3) Ghayathi, (4) Liwa, (5) Marfa (6) Sila'a and (7) Delma Island. Because of its rich natural resources, the Western Region provides 40% of the Emirate's GDP.

The region's most active industries are energy, agriculture, manufacturing and construction. Economic activities are varied between the seven settlements. For example, Al Ruwais is home to the ADNOC refineries and petrochemical plants, while 73% of Liwa's population is employed in agricultural fields (Oxford Business Group, 2010). The remaining settlements, such as Madinat Zayed and Ghayathi, employ citizens in construction, oil and gas, and agricultural fields primarily (Oxford Business Group, 2010). Of those employed, 69% of Emiratis in the Western Region work in government institutions and 27% work in joint (government and private) institutions (SCAD, 2015). Labor force participation rates among males in the region are high, at 97%. Among females, the participation rate is 42.5% (SCAD, 2015). Among those aged 15-19, participation rates are 23.4% among males and 1.3% among females. Among those aged 20-29, the male participation rate is 97.8% and among females it is 50.9% (SCAD, 2015).

Settlement Characteristics

Population

The density of the population differs in each of the seven cities of the Western Region. The largest towns in the area are Madinat Zayed, Liwa, and Al Ruwais. While exact population numbers for Emirati citizens are not available, representatives of the Western Region Municipality (WRM interview, 2016) confirmed that the largest populations of Emirati citizens live in the Madinat Zayed, Marfa and Ghayathi regions. Indeed, the area of the settlements also varies making some towns physically larger and more scattered than others.

Geography

The Western Region occupies a large land mass and so settlements tend to be scattered and far apart. Even in a single town, residential areas can be far flung. Sila' for example, is made up of multiple residential areas that vary in size, some being as small as 200 households (Western Region Municipality Interview, 2016). Some parts of the Western Region, such as Madinat Zayed and Marfa are more accessible from urban areas than are others.

For students, university enrolment necessitates a certain degree of travel. The educational centers in the region are Madinat Zayed and Al Ruwais, which are home to the only tertiary institutions. Residents of Marfa, Ghayathi, Sila, Delma, and Liwa have to travel to access them. Students also opt to study in Abu

Settlement	Total Population Size	Population by 2030
Madinat Zayed	29,095	61,000
Marfa	14,053	75,000
Al Ruwais	15,511	130,000
Ghayathi	14,022	21,000
Delma Island	48,11	-
Liwa	20,196	65,000
Sila'	7,900	17,500

Table 1. Population sizes in the Western Region (Oxford Business Group, 2010)

From	To	Distance in km
Madinat Zayed	Abu Dhabi City	180km
Madinat Zayed	Al Ain	300km
Madinat Zayed	Dubai	400km
Madinat Zayed	Al Ruwais	130

Table 2. Distance to urban centers: Madinat Zayed

From	To	Distance in km
Al Ruwais	Madinat Zayed	130
Al Ruwais	Abu Dhabi City	280km
Al Ruwais	Al Ain	400km
Al Ruwais	Dubai	430km

Table 3. Distance to urban centers: Al Ruwais

From	To	Distance in km
Marfa	Abu Dhabi City	175km
Marfa	Al Ain	300km
Marfa	Dubai	310km
Marfa	Madinat Zayed	70km

Table 4. Distance to urban centers: Marfa

From	To	Distance in km
Ghayathi	Abu Dhabi City	275km
Ghayathi	Al Ain	400km
Ghayathi	Dubai	400km
Ghayathi	Madinat Zayed	114km
Ghayathi	Al Ruwais	47km

Table 5. Distance to urban centers: Ghayathi

From	To	Distance in km
Liwa	Abu Dhabi City	250km
Liwa	Al Ain	350km
Liwa	Dubai	350km
Liwa	Madinat Zayed	115km
Liwa	Al Ruwais	220km

Table 6. Distance to urban centers: Liwa

From	To	Distance in km
Dalma Island	Abu Dhabi City	330km
Dalma Island	Al Ain	500km
Dalma Island	Dubai	472km
Dalma Island	Madinat Zayed	211km
Dalma Island	Al Ruwais	75km

Table 7. Distance to urban centers: Dalma Island

From	To	Distance in km
Sila'a	Abu Dhabi City	380km
Sila'a	Al Ain	469km
Sila'a	Dubai	512km
Sila'a	Madinat Zayed	250km
Sila'a	Al Ruwais	130km

Table 8. Distance to urban centers: Liwa

Dhabi City or Dubai, which also requires them to travel.

Culture

Despite the attention that has been paid to the western region, urbanization in the area is a relatively new phenomenon. This is for many reasons, one of which is that population growth in the area has been steadily rising over the years, but remains low. The Western Region's large land mass and low population density has posed unique development challenges in the region. However, infrastructure development by key stakeholders and government entities have increased the availability of modern amenities as well as retail and service centers.

The region continues to be one of the Emirate's most significant heritage areas where many cultural practices, considered endangered in other parts of the country, remain alive and well. Handicraft production, animal husbandry, camel breeding and cattle herding remain a part of daily life for many in the Western Region (Oxford Business Group, 2015). Additionally, pride in the area's Bedouin heritage, keeps the bond between the individuals in their natural surroundings strong. This presents a unique context in which modern life interacts with traditional heritage practices to produce a rich cultural landscape.

Development in the Region

The Western Region has been given special attention by the government of Abu Dhabi and the President of the UAE for decades. H. H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan emphasized the importance of developing the region, protecting its natural resources and heritage, and developing its human capital. In 1968, H.H. Sheikh Zayed established Madinat Zayed as the administrative center of the region (Oxford Business Group, 2010). Ever since, urbanization and settlement projects have been ongoing there. In 1998, nearly 750 new residential houses were built between Madinat Zayed and Sila' (Al Bayan, 1998) as a part of a larger regional strategy to develop the Western Region. At the time, the Abu Dhabi Municipality set out to develop the region's agriculture, and manufacturing sectors, improve the infrastructure in the region, and provide improved health services and residential housing. The plan predicted the rise in the population of the region by 2010 and suggested an increase in areas dedicated to financial and retail services, as well as improving transport and hotel accommodation. Recommendations were also made to improve roads in and around the region as well as dams, water storage units, and telephone lines (Al Bayan, 1998).

In 2006, and by Emiri Decree 20, the Office of the Ruler's Representative in the Western Region was restructured and entrusted with implementing the objectives established in the decree. The Court supports all activities of the Ruler's Representative, plans social awareness programs, and assists and empowers families, youth and women through special programs, coordinates relief and reports on the region's needs (RRC website).

Development plans and strategies in the region were under the purview of the Western Region Development Council which was established in 2006 by the Abu Dhabi government. The Council was to oversee the development of the region across human capital, infrastructure, economic development and tourism. Social, educational and economic development initiatives were implemented around the region ranging from building community centers to retail and service areas (Oxford Business Group, 2010).

Today, development and planning in the region is the responsibility of a number of stakeholders including the Western Region Municipality (WRM), which was also established in 2006. WRM offices and branches are located all over the region and are headquartered in Madinat Zayed. In addition to the Urban Planning Council, The WRM is responsible for urban planning infrastructure, and government services in all seven settlements.

Other key players that oversee the development and implementation of plans and programs in the Western Region include:

- Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council (UPC)
- Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC)
- Health Authority-Abu Dhabi (HAAD)
- Housing Development Committee
- Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority (ADWEA)
- Khalifa Fund to support and develop Small and Medium Enterprises

- Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority
- Family Development Foundation (FDF)

Al Gharbia 2030

The Plan Al Gharbia 2030 was launched in 2010 and outlines key development areas for the region. The development strategy in the region is based on the following pillars: environmental respect, social health, cultural identity and economic development (Al Gharbia Plan 2030). In order to achieve the plan, there has been significant investment in solar and alternative energy in the region, as well as in preservation of the natural habitat. In order to account for the increase in population in the region, there are plans for expansions in water desalination and storage capabilities, food and agricultural production, and real estate (Oxford Business Group, 2015).

Currently, key sectors in the region include oil and gas, energy, manufacturing, and agriculture. Oil and gas continues to be the largest sector in the region, contributing to 90% of the regional GDP (Oxford Business Group, 2015). However, the government of Abu Dhabi has ambitious goals for diversification in the region and even for achieving a knowledge economy there. In particular, there are plans to expand alternative energy sectors as well as hospitality and tourism sectors.

Education in the Region

The main regulator and planner of education in the region is the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC). The large majority of schools in the region are under the purview of the central Abu Dhabi government entity and are regularly evaluated and monitored by its Western Region office. Indeed, improving education in the region has long been a priority for the Abu Dhabi government as well as ADEC.

Today there are 44 schools, 32 of which are public and 12 of which are private (ADEC School Directory). The large majority of the region's schools are administered and regulated by ADEC. This means that all curricular reforms in the capital are implemented in the region. Recent ADEC reforms include adjusting curricula to focus on STEM subjects and weighting STEM courses at higher degrees than others. This move is a response to labour market demands as well as to the country's innovation and knowledge economy goals. Focus was also placed on English language instruction to improve English language proficiency among students and graduates in public schools.

This push for enhanced STEM education and English language instruction has meant new hires in Western Region schools, as well as increased hiring of foreign teachers able to teach English at native language fluency. Furthermore, this has meant that students no longer have a choice between humanities and science tracks. STEM subjects are also being taught in English to improve students' abilities to adjust to English language medium instruction in university.

The Gaps

Emirati youth between the ages of 15 and 29 (N=9,825) make up 34 % of the region's population (SCAD, 2014), making them the single largest demographic group. For this reason, policy makers must pay special attention to how well and to what degree this group is able to access educational and employment opportunities.

According to the DED Competitiveness report, under 10% of nationals, aged 10 years and above, in Abu Dhabi hold university degrees. The Western Region has a similar rate of attainment among Emiratis 10 years and above. The percentage of nationals with university degrees in Al Gharbia, in 2012, was 9.72% compared to 9.76% in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain (DED, 2012)

Secondary Schools

On average, there are 1.4 teachers per classroom (SCAD, 2015) in schools in Al Gharbia. In 2014 there was a total 9,726 UAE nationals enrolled in school (kindergarten to secondary) in the region (SCAD, 2015).

The large majority (98%) of Emirati students in the Western Region attend public schools (SCAD, 2012). The drop-out rate among secondary school students i was 2.7% for males and 1% for females in 2012 (SCAD, 2012).

Area	Total number of schools	Secondary schools	Public Schools	Private Schools
Madinat Zayed	12	6	6	6
Al Ruwais	8	5	5	3
Marfa	5	3	4	1
Liwa	4	4	4	0
Dalma Islands	2	0	2	0
Al Sila'a	4	2	4	0
Ghayathi	9	4	7	2

Table 9. Number of secondary schools in the region

Tertiary Institutions

On the higher education level, the Western Region currently has only one university, one college and one technical institute.

Institute	Offerings	Concentrations	Location
Higher Colleges of Technology	Bachelor's degree Masters Applied Diploma Work readiness Masters	Business Computer Information Systems Engineering	Al Ruwais Madinat Zayed
Fatima College of Health Sciences	Post-graduate diploma Bachelor's degree Master's degree	Physiotherapy Nursing Pharmacy Radiology and Medical Imaging Emergency Health Diabetes education Clinical care	Madinat Zayed
Baynounah Institute	Diploma	Project Management HR Logistics Management IT Media Technology Interior Design Graphic Design Jewelry Design Fashion Design Travel and Tourism Management Library services Industrial Technology Health and Safety	Madinat Zayed

Table 10. Tertiary institutions in the region

Entrepreneurship in the Region

In 2011, 81% of all businesses in the region were micro and small businesses and 64% were in the retail and services sectors (DED, 2012). According to a 2011 report by the Western Region Development Council, 78% of businesses in the region were owned by men (WRDC Presentation to the AD SG, 2011).

As with other parts of Abu Dhabi, there is preference in the Western Region for general retail stores and service oriented businesses (DED, 2012). While these certainly can benefit the community and the economy, these kinds of businesses tend to be difficult to scale up and provide little opportunity for local or external investments. Their impact is limited to the individual or the family which owns the enterprise. In the Western Region in particular, businesses are concentrated in traditional sectors such as food and agriculture. Diversification aims in the region require the development of businesses that can be scaled up and can contribute to the growth of new sectors.

The region's remote nature and its small populations make starting and sustaining a new enterprise especially challenging. Lack of investment in real estate, lack of availability of retail stores and distance from urban centers make overhead costs high. Additionally, population sizes make attracting new customers difficult.

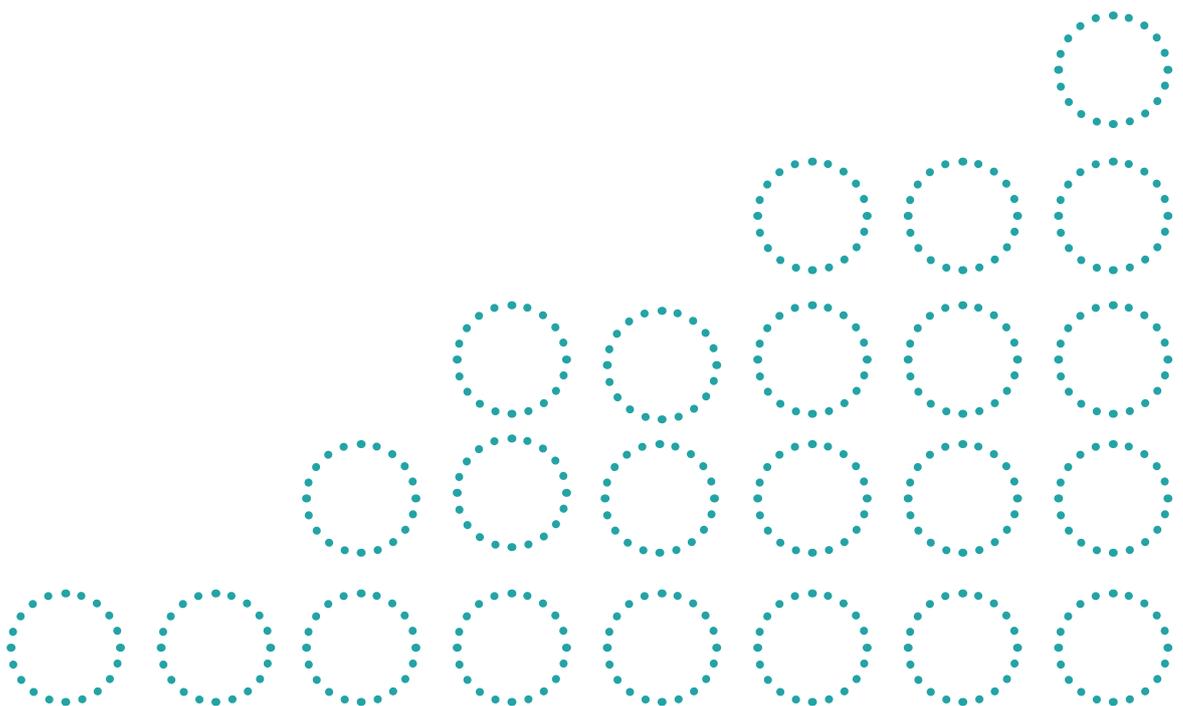
In order to support and nurture SMEs in the region, the Khalifa Fund works closely with government entities to provide funding and a support for SMEs. Initiatives such as Sougha, have helped artisans and craftsmen in the region develop their skills and turn their trade into a viable business (Al Sougha Website).

Settlement	Number of businesses (2011 data)
Madinat Zayed	70
Marfa	66
Al Ruwais	-
Ghayathi	38
Dalma Island	68
Liwa	10
Sila'	17

Table 11. Number of SMEs in the region (2011 data)

2

THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE REGION



THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE REGION

Remote and Rural Areas

Remote areas in most parts of the world share specific characteristics that result from their distance from urban centers and the disparity in development between urban centers and rural areas. For example, economies in remote areas tend to be small and limited and so employment options and opportunities are not as varied as they are in cities. Furthermore, development disparities in remote areas, particularly in the developing world, mean that a larger than average proportion of the population has not been educated beyond the high school level. In many parts of the world, there is a gap in educational attainment between rural and urban areas. This means that remote and rural areas present unique educational and employment contexts.

There is a global propensity for educational attainment to be higher in urban areas than in rural areas (Knight and Shi, 1996; Sahn and Stifel, 2003; Ulubasoglu and Cardak, 2007). On the one hand, urban centers attract educated workers because the return on education in cities is higher than in rural areas. On the other hand, young people in cities tend to earn higher degrees at higher rates than do young people in rural areas. Access to universities, the cost of distance, educational backgrounds of family members, economic backgrounds, and quality of education, as well as the demands of local labour markets in rural areas impact the decisions of young people to pursue higher education.

On average, all over the world, educational attainment of parents in remote areas are likely to be lower than those of parents in urban areas (Knight and Shi, 1996; Sahn and Stifel, 2003; Ulubasoglu and Cardak, 2007). This is important because studies have established a strong relationship between parental educational attainment and the likelihood that children will pursue higher education (Davis-Kean, 2005; Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1994; Haveman and Wolfe, 1995; Nagin and Tremblay, 2001; Drolet, 2005; Finnie, Lascelles and Sweetman, 2005). Parental educational attainment is also closely correlated with household income whereby families with educated members tend to earn more. Studies have found that household income impacts participation in tertiary education. Existing research suggests that children from poorer families tend to do worse in school than their wealthier counterparts (Gregg and Machin, 2000; Krueger, 2004).

Academic achievement and the quality of primary and secondary education in remote areas influences tertiary education attainment as well because academic ability has been found to be a strong determinant of participation in tertiary education (Bishop, 1977; Yang, 1981). Since tertiary educational attainment is strongly correlated with higher wages (Dearden, Ferri and Meghir, 2000) and career success, the quality of schools has a significant impact on later life success.

Labour market characteristics in remote and rural areas impact the cost and returns on university education and therefore impact student decisions to pursue higher education. In urban areas, the return on investment in education is more guaranteed than in rural or remote areas where investment in education is costlier (due to the need to travel or migrate), and where local labour market needs are limited (Newbold and Brown, 2015). The expected value of the return on investment in education is strongly related to the decision to pursue higher education (Fortin, 2005).

Finally, distance from urban centers and universities plays an important role in tertiary education attainment. Accessibility of universities is seen as a barrier to university participation (Gibbons and Vignoles, 2012; Dickerson and McIntosh, 2013). Studies have suggested that the presence of a local university increases participation in higher education (Card, 1999; Frenette, 2007). Even when studies have shown that university participation per se is not impacted by distance, university choice is (Gibbons and Vignoles, 2012). This means that distance from universities not only impacts the rate at which students earn higher degrees, but also the quality of the universities in which they choose to enroll. Students are constrained by proximity and so have limited choices of competitive institutions or concentrations.

Thinking About Access and Equity: Defining Education Equality

Equality and equity in education are topics that have been widely debated for decades. Ideas about educational equality fall roughly into five categories as described by Ben-Shahar (2016):

Meritocratic approach

According to the meritocratic approach to educational justice, people with the same level of merit should

have "the same chances of success". This means that all other factors that impact students' success should be made less influential or eliminated. In this case, the only thing that should impact student success is the talent of the given student and the effort they exert to achieve their goals. Using this approach, the most important task of educational justice is to remove the impact of external factors such as race, gender, geography, and income on student achievement.

Effort- only approach

The "effort-only" approach is similar to the meritocratic approach, however, it rejects differences based on natural talent. Instead, this approach argues that students who exert the same effort in educational activities or to achieve educational goals deserve the same chances at success.

In this case, both disparities caused by innate ability and by socio-economic background, race or gender, are seen as unjust.

Adequacy approach

An adequacy approach to education equality requires only that students be given "enough" education to meet a minimum standard. Exactly what constitutes adequate is highly debated in the literature. This approach to educational equality has been helpful for encouraging raising educational standards for the worst off children. However, it is not concerned with the equalizing education across the board. Instead it is concerned with maintaining a minimum standard of quality and access.

Equality approach

The equality approach goes one step further and argues that the inequality above the threshold of "adequacy" is unjust and that no students should be disadvantaged by their circumstances. This approach is based on the idea that we live in a competitive society and that education is a marketable commodity that increases one's competitiveness in the labour market. Because employment and other career opportunities are limited, increasing the educational attainment of one group, enables them to have more of that limited resource than others. As such, the only way to achieve equality in education is to provide all students and all children with equal educations, and not merely adequate educations.

Priortarian approach

In this approach, theorists argue that justice in education entails giving priority to the worst-off in society. This means preferring the worst off when distributing educational resources. This argument is not one for taking resources or benefits away from the better off, instead it is an argument for prioritizing the needs of the worst off, while not harming the better-off. However, as Ben-Shahar notes, if education is a "positional" good (as argued by proponents of the equality approach), then it follows that prioritizing the needs of the worst-off will necessarily harm the better off. Which has led to objections to this form of educational justice.

Unique Dilemmas: Equality in Opportunity for the Western Region

Notions of equality in educational or employment opportunities are varied and are highly debated. However, they are important to think about because they prompt us to ask what equality of opportunity might mean for youth in the Western Region. Are the aims of equality, in this case, to provide students in the Western Region with a minimum standard of education? Is it to ensure that Western Region students with high potential have the same chances for success as their urban counterparts? Or is it to ensure that educational levels and outcomes in the Western Region are equal to those in other parts of the country?

While these questions are not easily answered, we can take elements of each of the approaches outlined above and argue that students in the Western Region should not be disadvantaged by their backgrounds or by their geographic location, and that students should be given an equal chance to succeed in education as their counterparts in other parts of the country. As a first step, we might consider what it means to level the playing field for Western Region students.

Thinking about gender equality in education in a unique context

While many developing countries are worried about getting more girls in school, many developed countries have become concerned that girls far outperform boys in schools and are enrolling in universities at a much higher rate. The UAE, like many countries around the world, has a much higher rate of girls than boys enrolled in university (roughly 70%). Girls in the Western Region are, indeed, outperforming their male counterparts. However, their access to quality higher education is impeded by a number of very specific factors such as limited mobility. This creates a complex context from which to begin to think about what gender equality in education might mean for the region. Further, it challenges us to think about equality both in terms of access to and quality of educational opportunities.

Thinking of language as a hindrance to educational equality

For many countries in the developing world, English medium universities have been critiqued as increasing educational gaps between urban youth of high economic status and rural youth with low economic status. Scholars and activists argue that children who do not speak the language of instruction at universities and have rarely been exposed to it in their schools are disadvantaged both in university admissions and capacity to succeed in higher education (Tsui and Tollefson, 2004, Benson, 2004). Here again, the context of the Western Region poses a special dilemma. English language acquisition and instruction in the region remains a challenge. Indeed, multiple reforms have been enacted in the primary and secondary schooling system to improve English language proficiency. However, many students who are currently in high school or recently graduated were unable to benefit from such reforms. As a result, their English language proficiency remains low. For many, this poses a challenge to university access and places an undue burden on universities to bridge the language gap faced by students. While English language medium teaching in universities is a barrier to access for many, the requirements of the labour market make it a necessity and failing to provide students with this necessary skill will disadvantage them in the future. This challenges us to think about how students can be provided with equal opportunities at both ends of the pipeline – before entering university, and after exiting university.

Distance as a barrier to access

Distance from urban centers and settlement dispersion poses a unique challenge to providing equal opportunities in the Western Region. On the one hand, the burden of commuting, migrating or traveling regularly and considerably disadvantages students from the Western Region whose academic performance, class attendance, and ability to learn is significantly impacted by the long hours spent on the road. Furthermore, the burden of travel increases the cost associated with higher education and decreases motivation among students to attain higher degrees. At the same time, low population densities and dispersed settlements make it near impossible for public or private universities to set up in the region. Distance and e-learning alternatives, while tempting, require a self-directed learner already equipped with significant skills and a solid secondary school foundation. In the absence of adequate preparation, even distance learning solutions may pose an equality challenge whereby only those students fortunate enough to have good teachers or go to rigorous schools will be able to succeed.

FACTORS INFLUENCING UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE

Internal, psychological factors as well as external, environmental factors have a role to play in influencing university attendance. Student motivation is key in driving students to apply to universities and pursue higher education. Motivation is impacted by environmental factors such as parental goal emphasis, cultural attitudes toward university education and perception of costs and rewards of pursuing tertiary education. Furthermore, environmental barriers such as distance from universities, lack of access due to language barriers, and societal attitudes can act as mitigators of the positive impact of motivation.

Motivation

There are two kinds of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation is the idea that human beings are curious and active, make meaning from experience and seek to be competent at what they value (McCombs and Whisler, 1997). "Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in a task for its own inherent rewards whereas extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in a task in order to attain some separable outcome" (p. 371, Hayenga and Corpus, 2010). An individual can experience intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation or both together. Extrinsic motivation is more easily observable than intrinsic motivation and is the result of external rewards such as money or accolades. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is not easily observable and is the drive that occurs without external influence.

A study by Hayenga and Corpus (2010) aimed at evaluating combinations of these showed that students with high levels of intrinsic motivation performed better than students with high levels of extrinsic motivation (even if coupled with high levels of intrinsic motivation). Some studies have shown that extrinsic motivation may have an "undermining function" on student achievement whereby introducing external rewards may reduce motivation for future task completion if the reward is later removed (Hayenga and Corpus, 2010; Cameron and Pierce, 1994).

It is important to note that motivation is not an observable trait (Denddhart et al., 2008). Therefore, motivation can only be indirectly observed through the behaviors and actions it incites.

Theories of motivation posit multiple factors that might impact intrinsic motivation.

Maintaining congruence between sense of self and actions

According to a theory developed by Boshier (1973), individuals will participate in educational activities when they see that there is a correspondence between their own goals and perceptions of self and the educational program and environment in which they will partake (Boshier 1973). Congruence between education and the social goals and aspirations is a strong motivator that influences the choices that people make and the activities in which they choose to partake.

Expectancy theory

According to expectancy theory, individuals make choices between alternative behaviours depending on what they expect the result of those behaviours to be. Vroom (1964) was the first to outline a theory of expectancy and stated that effort, motivation, and performance are linked. Vroom outlines three characteristics of motivation: expectancy, instrumentality and valence. Expectancy is the belief that an increased effort at a particular task will lead to improved performance. Instrumentality is the belief that improved performance will lead to a desired reward and valence is the value that a person places on a particular outcome or reward.

Self-efficacy theory

Bandura takes theories of motivation further and outlines how motivation and behavior interact to impact educational outcomes. Beliefs in one's ability to succeed at a given task is said to influence the persistence and effort applied to that task and therefore to the likelihood of success at that task. Studies conducted to test this relationship have shown that people with similar skills and competencies can perform differently on the same tasks such that those with higher self-efficacy will perform better than those with lower self-efficacy (Bouffard-Bouchard, 2001).

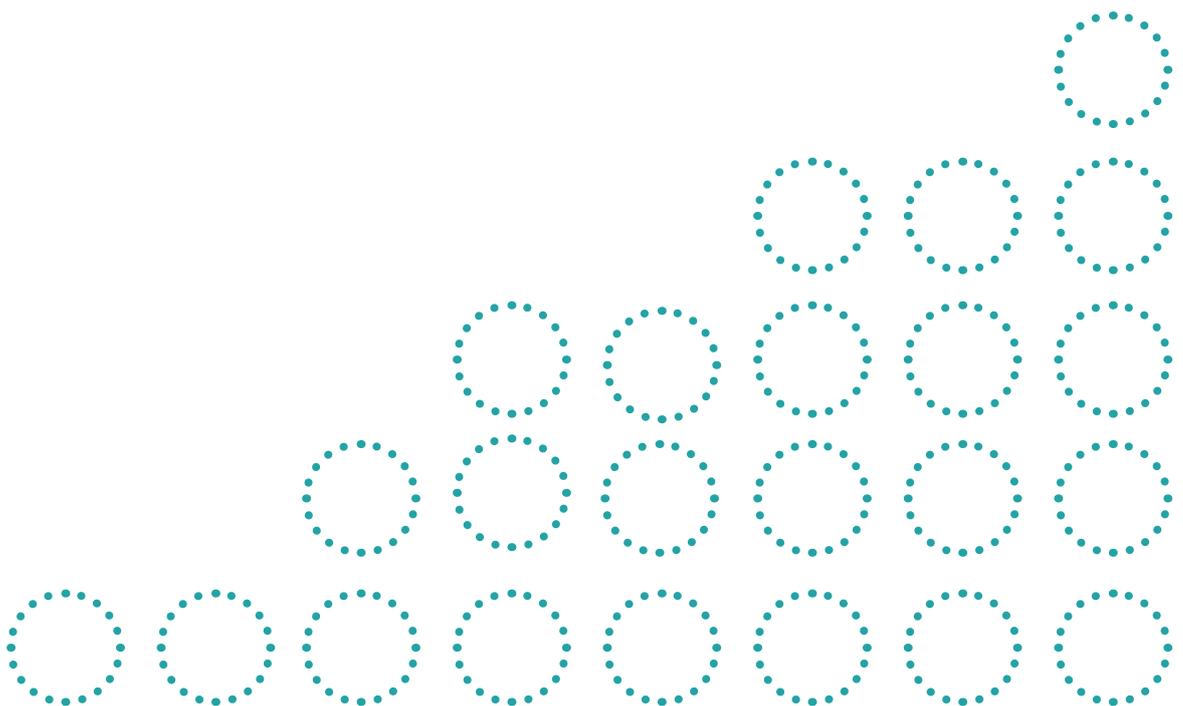
Environmental factors

Graham-Brown (1991) identifies "education filters" that reproduce existing hierarchies and barriers to participation. These may exist in the educational system or the wider economy and society. The educational filters include those that are defined by government, those that are created by limited educational provision in places like rural areas or underfunded urban areas, belonging to a disadvantaged group, selection through examinations, socio-economic conditions and the attribution of different values to different kinds of education and work.

McGivney (1993) provides another way of looking at barriers by differentiating them into situational, institutional, and dispositional factors. Situational barriers are those arising from one's situation at a given time and include lack of money, lack of time, and lack of transport. Institutional barriers are those arising from practices and procedures that exclude or discourage from participation and include inconvenient schedules or locations of programmes, or lack of relevant programmes. Dispositional Barriers are those related to attitudes and self-perceptions such lack of confidence due to previous achievement, or being tired of school or class. Previous achievement and bad experiences with learning become psychological barriers to education.

3

THE STUDY



THE STUDY

Research on the barriers and drivers of educational attainment and employment in the Western Region is scarce. Given the unique nature of the geographic, economic and cultural context of the region, questions about youth perspectives, motivations, and drivers have to be approached with care and attention to the nuances and peculiarities of the region.

In order to get the fullest picture possible, this study employs a mixed method approach. Through field visits to schools and universities, as well as interviews with Emirati youth, educators, and employers, we were able to understand the distinctive characteristics of the region, and of each individual settlement. Additionally, qualitative data was used to build the foundation of surveys that were later administered to school and university students. Our study employs a number of established frameworks to understand motivations to pursue higher education and employment, while at the same time paying special attention to the unique context in which Western Region youth live and learn.

Purpose of the Research

This study is exploratory and so, our initial goals were broad in nature. First, we wanted to understand what leads high school students to intend to pursue higher education after graduation. Second, we tried to understand what leads university students to seek employment and what enables their success in finding work. Third, we wanted to get a sense of the entrepreneurial intent among youth in the Western Region.

Specifically, we wanted to understand:

1. The impact of youth backgrounds on motivation to pursue higher education
2. The impact of youth backgrounds on motivation to seek employment
3. The impact of parental involvement on youth motivation to pursue higher education
4. The attitudes among youth toward higher education and employment
5. The drivers and barriers to higher education attainment
6. The drivers and barriers to employment
7. The entrepreneurial intent among youth

Methodology

In order to achieve these aims, we used a mixed methodology consisting of three surveys and in depth interviews.

Qualitative method

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the subjective quality of factors that influence motivation to enroll in university and seek employment, we conducted in depth interviews with the following groups:

1. Youth

We conducted interviews with 12 young Emirati nationals from Madinat Zayed – 4 were still university students, though their ages varied between 18 and 29, 1 was a high school student, and 2 were looking for work. Of the 12, 6 were men and 6 were women.

Interview participants were asked about their motivations and reasons for participation or non-participation in tertiary education, their experience with schooling, the factors and individuals that influenced their decision making, and the facilitators and barriers to both tertiary education and employment.

2. High school teachers and principals

We conducted in depth interviews with 15 high school principals and teachers. 10 were teachers and principals in boys' schools and 5 were teachers and principals in girls' schools or were in charge of both sections. 14 interviewees worked in public schools and 1 worked in a private school. Of those, only one principal worked in an English medium school.

High school teachers and principals were asked about their experiences in teaching, the ways in which their schools have adjusted to reforms to curricula, hiring practices, teacher turnover, challenges faced in the classroom, their experiences with students and parents, and their impressions of student motivations to attend university.

3. University directors

We conducted two interviews with directors at major universities in the region. Interviewees were asked about their experience in recruiting and retaining students in the region, their experience with setting up programs and recruiting teaching staff, the relationship of their institutions to industry, and the challenges they face in providing tertiary education in the region.

4. Employers

We conducted four interviews with public sector employers in the region, and in three settlements. Interviewees were asked about their experience with hiring in the region, their expectations of employees, and their perception of employment challenges.

Quantitative method

Three surveys were developed for this research project with three distinct aims.

1. Survey for high school students and those who have not earned a university degree

This survey consisted of 55 items (not all respondents were required to answer all items) and asked respondents about their background, parental involvement in their schooling, satisfaction with their high schools, levels of preparation for university, their desire to enroll in university and drivers and challenges to doing so, and desire to work and industries of choice.

Surveys aimed at high school students were distributed to students during the school day and collected by the researchers and teachers. Researchers visited high schools in Madinat Zayed, Marfa, Al Ruwais, Ghayathi, and Sila. Due to the small number of high school students in Liwa (>10), surveys were distributed to those students electronically. In order to target individuals who have graduated high school but have not attended university, surveys were disseminated through the employee databases of major employers in the region, as well as through the database of a regional career fair.

Measures and scales

A. Background characteristics survey: This includes items that investigate the background characteristics of respondents namely: age, gender, number of siblings, parents' employment status, parents' industry of employment, parents' educational level, number of reading materials at home, presence of a computer or internet connection, availability of transport and ability to travel, etc.

B. Perceived parent goal emphasis scale: this is an instrument development by Friedel et al. (2007) and assesses students' perceptions of their parents' goal emphasis. It measures students' perceptions of the value their parents place on both mastery and performance goals.

C. Career Decision Self Efficacy Scale: This instrument was designed by Betz and Taylor (1994) and measures a variety of self-efficacy expectations related to career decision tasks.

D. Expectancy-Value-Cost Scale: This instrument consists of 10 items and three areas and measures students' success expectancy, value perception and cost perception of a specific task or endeavour.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilizes some of the most widely used and accepted motivation theories in the field of education. Primarily, we rely on (1) Expectancy value theory, (2) Self Efficacy Theory and (3) Social

Cognitive Career Theory and their resultant instruments in the design of our surveys. These theories will be complimented by qualitative analysis of the specific socio-cultural context of the Western Region. Our survey instruments are designed to incorporate the insights gleaned from both so as to understand the challenges facing youth in the most holistic way possible.

Expectancy-Value theory

Expectancy value theory is a theory developed by Eccles and Wigfield (1985) that argues that choice, persistence and achievement in a particular activity can be explained by a student's beliefs in their own ability to be successful at it and the extent to which they value that activity. The Eccles et al. framework predicts that students will choose courses that (1) they think they can succeed at and (2) they believe are valuable. The model is divided into subjective task value and expectation of success. Subjective task value can then be subdivided into (a) interest-enjoyment value, (b) attainment value, (c) utility value and (d) relative cost. According to Eccles (2009), students' beliefs about their own identity and their expectation of success, and the value they attach to educational options determine the likelihood that they will decide to pursue them.

In the expectancy-value model, environmental factors, such as the socio-economic status of the family, (i.e. educational attainment of parents, family's access to resources, the size of the family, etc.) impacts students' perceptions of educational activities and paths. First, this is because students are impacted by their parents' beliefs and behaviours. Second, this is because the environment in which students find themselves impacts the opportunities and rewards that they are exposed to. As such, their perception of the value of a task and their ability to succeed in it is heavily influenced by socio-cultural factors.

Self-Efficacy Theory

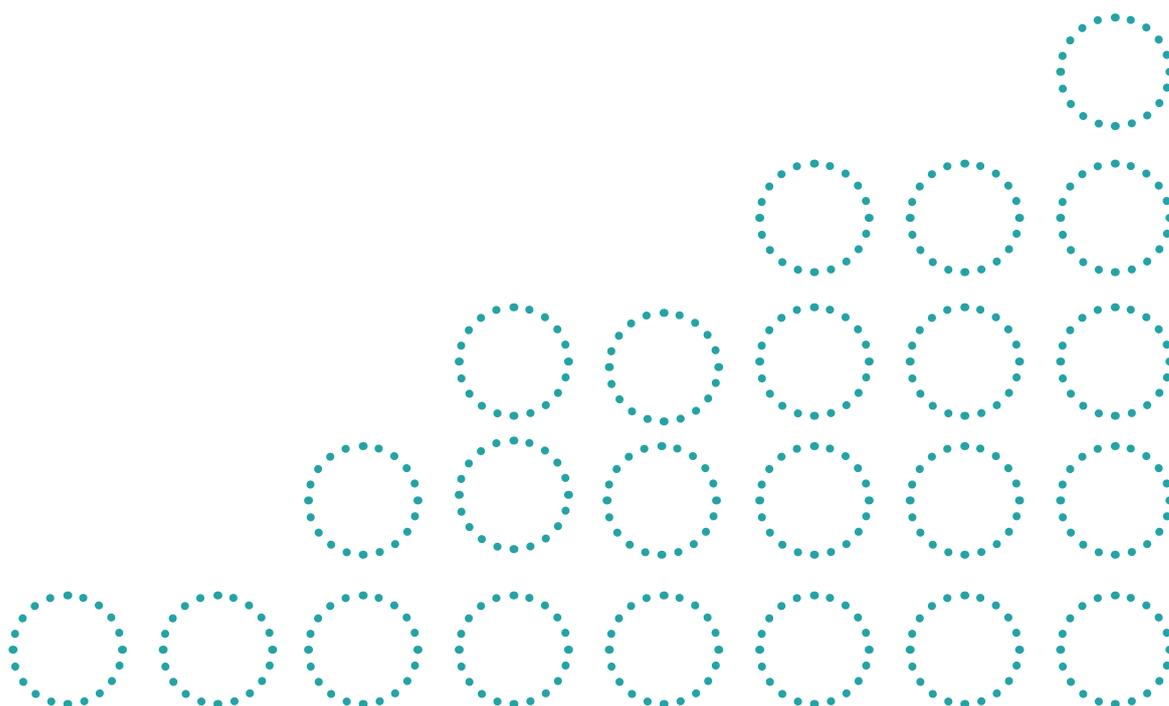
Self-efficacy theory is a theory developed by Bandura (1977) and refers to a person's judgement of their confidence to learn, perform academic tasks or succeed in academic endeavours. Self-efficacy theory is task specific and allows researchers to inquire directly into a subject's judgements toward their ability to perform at a specific task or to succeed at a specific goal (such as attaining a higher degree). Research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs are important mediators of achievement and persistence, as well as of career choices.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory is a framework used for predicting the processes involved in developing career and academic interests. It examines the ways in which systemic factors influence educational and career development of adolescents. It is based on self-efficacy and expectancy theories and utilizes both to predict why young people choose certain career paths over others. It can be utilized to explain why students choose not to attend university as well as the careers they choose to pursue.

4

PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION: RESULTS OF THE HIGHSCHOOL STUDENT STUDY



THE CONTEXT

In order to understand the ways in which factors come together to influence students' experiences in high school, we interviewed teachers and principals in secondary schools all over the region.

Interviews with principals and teachers painted a picture of dedicated lifetime educators who have spent the better parts of their careers in secondary schools in the Western Region. The shortest stint of any one teacher we encountered was seven years. Though teachers were often moved from one school to another, some had spent as many as 27 years teaching in WR schools.

Principals and teachers enthusiastically pointed to the fact that schooling in the region had made huge leaps in the past decade, but the most impressive of which happened in the last 2-5 years. Investment in school infrastructure was apparent, particularly in primary schools. Additionally, they indicated that the location of the Ruler's representative, H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Madinat Zayed had brought new found attention to schools in the area. They noted that H.H. made regular visits to schools and encouraged an education culture among youth.

However, teachers and principals in boys' schools still complained of a student body that was difficult to engage, and even more difficult to manage. They indicated that the lack of educational attainment among parents led to a devaluing of education among students and to neglect of educational responsibilities. For example, principals in schools all over the region (both boys and girls) told us that a majority of students did not attend school on Sundays or Thursdays and that this was at their parents' request. Principals claimed that students travelled with their families on these days. The boys, in particular, were said to "go out to the desert" with their fathers, particularly if their fathers engaged in camel breeding.

Parents, we were told, were not involved in their children's schooling, did not come to meetings and were generally unavailable. Among the girls, this issue was much less severe. Mothers were reported to pay more attention to their children's schooling. However, for the boys, cultural norms make it difficult for their mothers to interact regularly with male teachers. As such, they are often neglected in comparison to their female counterparts.

Additionally, teachers indicated that up until recently, primary school education in the region was poor and has led to students who lack basic foundational skills in reading and arithmetic. Secondary schools are then required to take in these students and bring them up to speed. A task that they say is near impossible. Therefore, new educational reforms have been difficult to implement in the region as they require a certain degree of English proficiency, and a certain level of proficiency in reading and arithmetic.

To make matters more complex, the switch to teaching some science subjects in English has created a major rift between teachers and students in the region. Foreign teachers have a difficulty communicating with young men and women who do not understand them. Similarly, students are unable to communicate effectively with their teachers and end up feeling unheard and misunderstood. According to our interviewees, there was a high turnover among foreign teachers, who were largely unaware and unprepared to live and work in the region. Furthermore, principals had no control over who is hired into their schools, as hiring is done through central ADEC mechanisms. For this reason, they could not account for the lack of awareness of new hires.

Teachers reported that there was a great deal of variance in educational achievement between students in their schools. While a majority of students are said to be of average or below average performance, there are some stand outs. In fact, two principals were very proud to announce to us that their students were among the top in the region or even in the emirate.

Principals reported that at least 80% of their students attend university at some point after graduation. They did indicate that most get jobs first and continue their education while they work. Because many of their students cannot earn the requisite IELTS scores to attend one of local universities, they choose to travel to Dubai to attend private universities. Those universities, while private and some unaccredited, do not require an entrance exam and allow students to attend classes during the weekends. This luxury is reserved primarily for male students. With the exception of Madinat Zayed, and Al Ruwais, principals at female schools told us that few or none of their students attend university outside of the region. Indeed, for many, the trip to and from Madinat Zayed or Al Ruwais was trouble enough. In fact, interviewees informed us that many girls receive government scholarships to study abroad, but due to family pressures, they do not avail of those opportunities. Boys' schools on the other hand, send several

students to study abroad each year. Aside from university, many students, boys and girls (though this was said more often about the boys than the girls) joined the police or the army after graduation.

SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics of the Sample

The survey developed for this study targeted youth (aged 15-29) who were still in high school or whose highest earned degree was a high school degree. The survey was distributed online and in person. We received 304 responses out of a total of 385 attempts, giving us a dropout rate of 8%. Of the sample, 80% are between the ages of 15 and 17. The area of residence of respondents is almost equally distributed between Madinat Zayed (29%), Marfa (26%), Ghayathi (24%) and Sila'a (20%). Only 1% of responses came from Al Ruwais, reflecting the small population of Emirati high school students in the area. Similarly, the small population of students in Liwa resulted in no responses from that region.

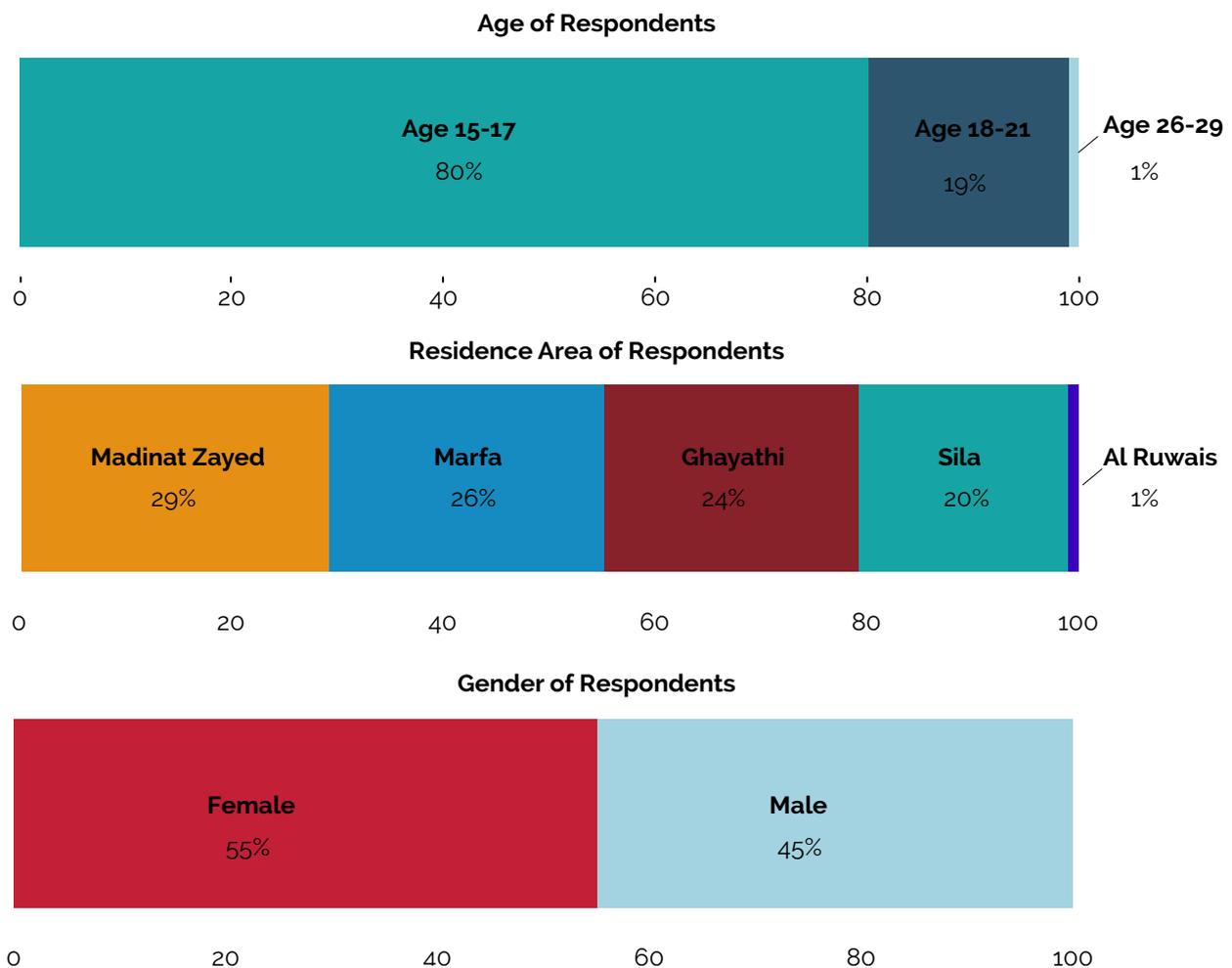


Figure 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

The gender split among respondents was almost equal. 45% of our respondents were male and 55% were female.

Respondents were also asked questions about their parents' educational background. Results from this section were unsurprising and reflected the observations that emerged from our qualitative data. On average, both fathers and mothers had no more than a high school degree (see figure. 2). The greatest variance was amongst respondents from Madinat Zayed. While parents of the majority (71%) of respondents in all settlements were largely without university degrees, 53% of fathers and 66% mothers in Madinat Zayed had not earned a university degree. 50% and 35% respectively, had a diploma or above. Sila'a had the lowest proportion of parents with university degrees. Indeed, Sila'a also had the

highest proportion of parents who did not complete high school. The majority of mothers of students in the region had not attained a high school degree (43%) or earned no more than a high school degree (34%).

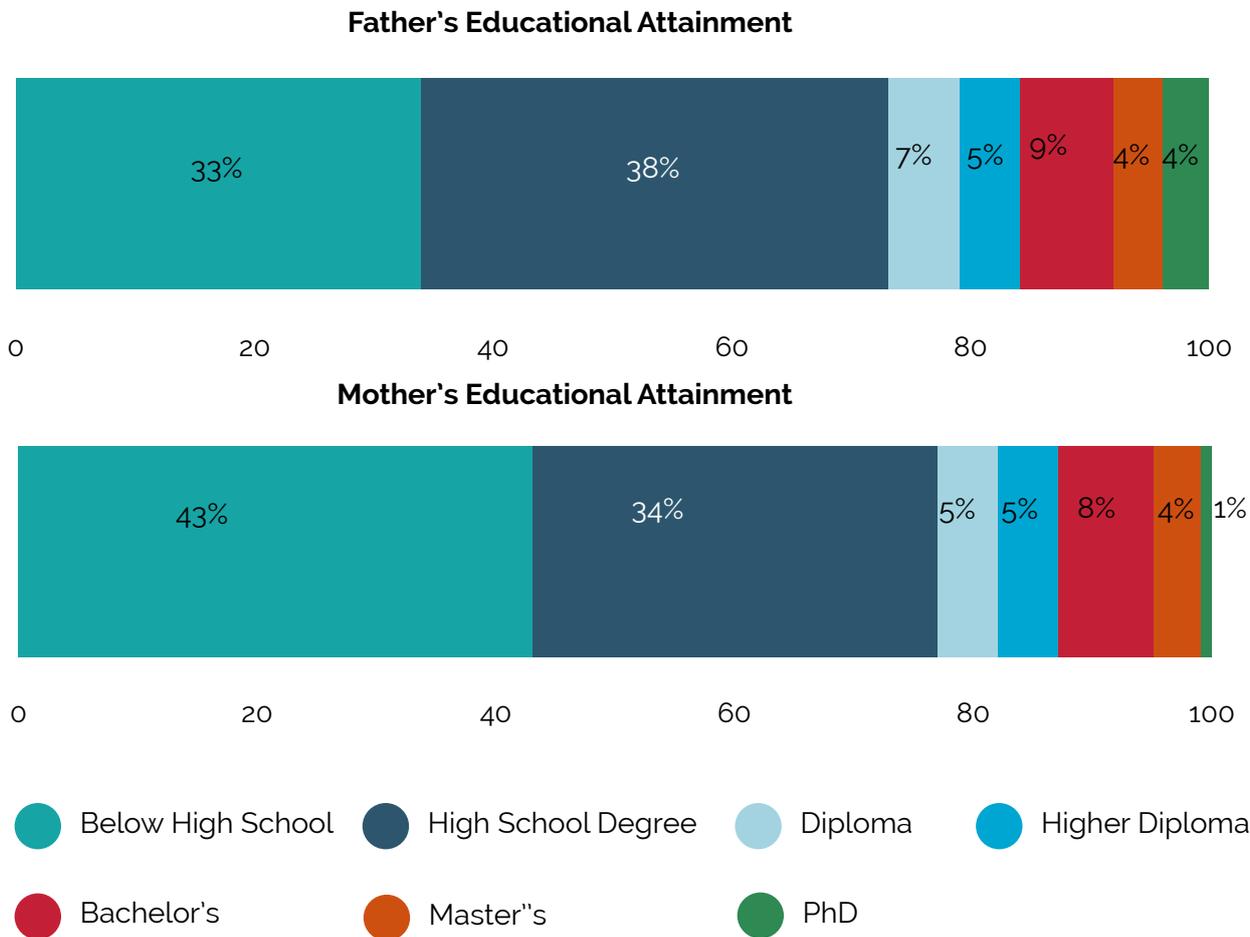


Figure 2. Educational attainment of respondents' parents

Correlation analysis showed that there were significant relationships between parents' educational attainment and parental encouragement of university attendance ($r=.153$), indicating that parents' education levels have an impact on their attitudes toward their children's education. There was also a significant correlation between mothers' educational attainment and the degree to which students thought that their high school classes are easy. These findings are aligned with literature that suggests that parental education has a significant impact on a child's performance in school. Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that there is a predictive relationship between mother's education and students' desire to be employed, such that the more education a mother has, the more likely the student has reported that they want to look for a job in the future ($t= 2.54, p=0.005$).

When asked about their parents' employment status, respondents indicated that 15% of their fathers were not employed while 77% of their mothers were not employed. The majority of parent's employment was in the public sector (fathers = 66%, mothers=19%). Ghayathi reported the highest proportion of fathers who owned their own businesses while Sila' reported the highest proportion of fathers working in the public sector, followed by Marfa, Ghayathi and Madinat Zayed.

Regression analysis indicated that there was a predictive relationship between father's employment status and the employment status of the student respondent such that, a respondent with an employed father was more likely to have worked at some point or to be currently employed ($t=3.35, p=.001$). This indicates that working parents may be better able to guide their children through the process of gaining meaningful employment and better positioned to help introduce their children to networks of employers.

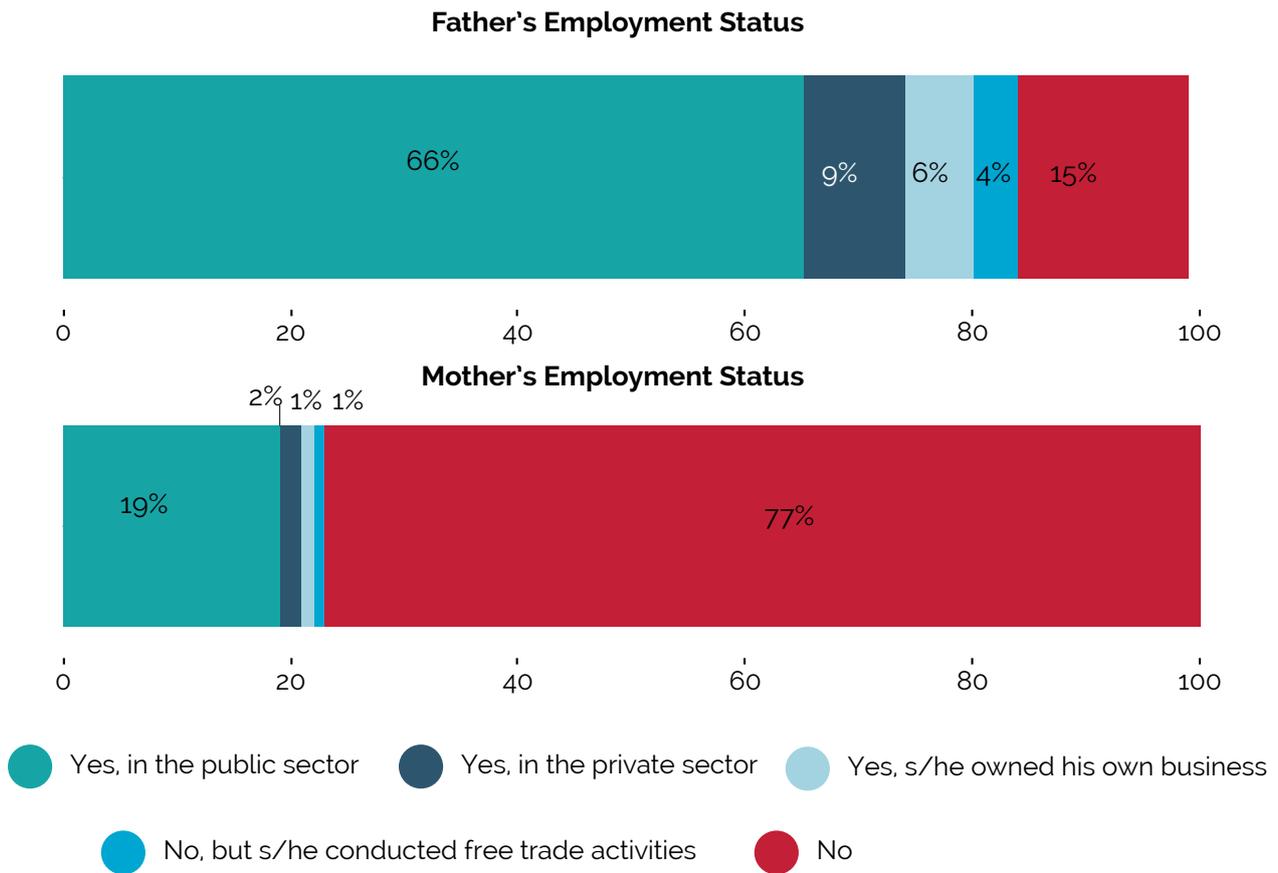


Figure 3. Employment status of respondents' parents

Respondents' family sizes tended to be big, with 46% having 4-6 siblings and 25% having 7-11 siblings.

96% of respondents reported having internet at home. 38% reported using the internet between 1-3 hours a day and 29% reported using the internet for more than 6 hours a day. While 80% of students reported having reading materials at home, 64% said that they read for less than an hour a day or did not read at all.

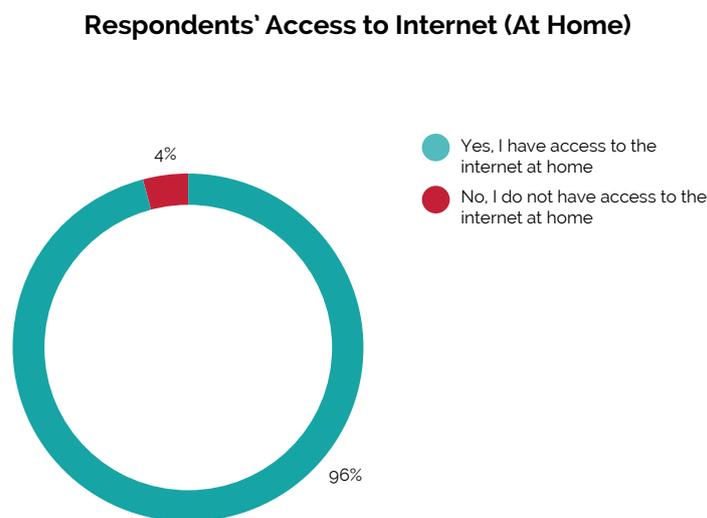


Figure 4. Respondents' access to the internet (at home)

With regard to access to transport, 64% of respondents said that they owned their own car. This is in line with reports by principals and teachers who said that the majority of their students, especially the boys, owned their own cars and drove to school. For most, transportation was easily accessible. Only 19% of respondents reported that they either could not access transport frequently or could only access it sometimes.

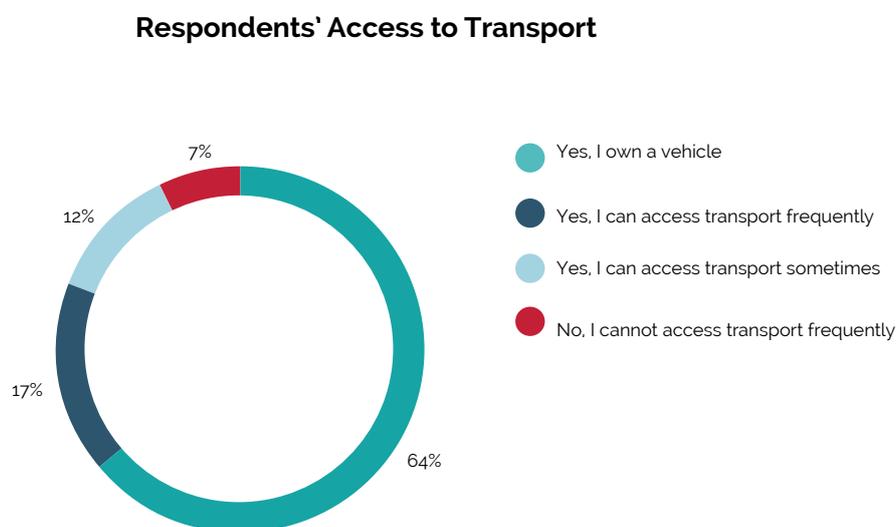


Figure 5. Respondents' access to transportation

Attitudes Toward Education and Employment

Students tended to have a positive perception of university education. 93% (75%= strongly agree, 18% = agree) of respondents agreed that university education was important and 93% believed that getting a higher degree would help them to achieve their goals. Here, the instrumental usefulness of education is apparent to students who seem to have an understanding that university education is a pre-requisite for success in their individual lives. By and large, the strong agreement with positive statements about education, such as its ability to improve social skills, and expand horizons reflects the findings of our interviews which suggested that young people view education not just as an instrument to achieve goals, but also as a civilizing factor. For them, education enabled them to achieve social status, understand themselves and others (89% of respondents agreed that education was the best way to develop the self) and develop their communities.

Correlation analysis indicated that gender and residence area was significantly correlated with attitudes toward education. Girls were more likely than boys to have a positive attitude toward education in general. In particular, the difference in attitude relating to the importance of education (83% of girls compared to 63% of boys) could be attributable to gender differences ($r=.217$) whereby girls are more likely to think education is important. Additionally, a significant difference was found between girls' and boys' long term aspiration to go to university ($r=.156$) whereby girls were more likely than boys to claim that they have always known that they will go to university (63% of girls strongly agreed compared to 47% of boys).

Residence area impacted the degree to which students' agreed that a university education will impact their success in life. Correlation analysis indicated a significant difference between respondents from the different regions with regard to their belief that their success will be impacted by their education ($r=.119$). Students in Marfa, Ghayathi, and Sila were more likely than students in Madinat Zayed and Al Ruwais to think that education will impact their success. This might be attributable to the opportunities available to those students in each of the seven settlements.

Positive attitudes toward education impacted students' intentions to apply to university. There was a significant correlation between students' belief that university education was important ($r=-.318$), their belief that it will help them achieve their goals ($r=-.277$), and their belief that it is a national duty ($r=-.285$) and their intention to get a university education ($r=-.318$). Indicating that students who viewed education as necessary to fulfill their individual goals, and those of their country, were more likely to plan to attend university.

Regarding their beliefs about university access, students tended to agree that any one, if they were determined enough, could get a university education. However, perceptions about university accessibility varied. In terms of distance, 32% of respondents believed that it was easy to find a university close to where they lived. A higher proportion of respondents from Ghayathi (29%) disagreed that it was easy to find a university close to home than from other areas. In terms of affordability, 48% of respondents believed that university education is inexpensive. A higher proportion of respondents from Madinat Zayed (23%) thought that university was expensive than from other areas. 55% percent of respondents disagreed that the Western Region provided an enabling environment, a higher proportion of respondents from Marfa (35%) disagreed with that statement than from other areas.

Attitudes Toward University Education

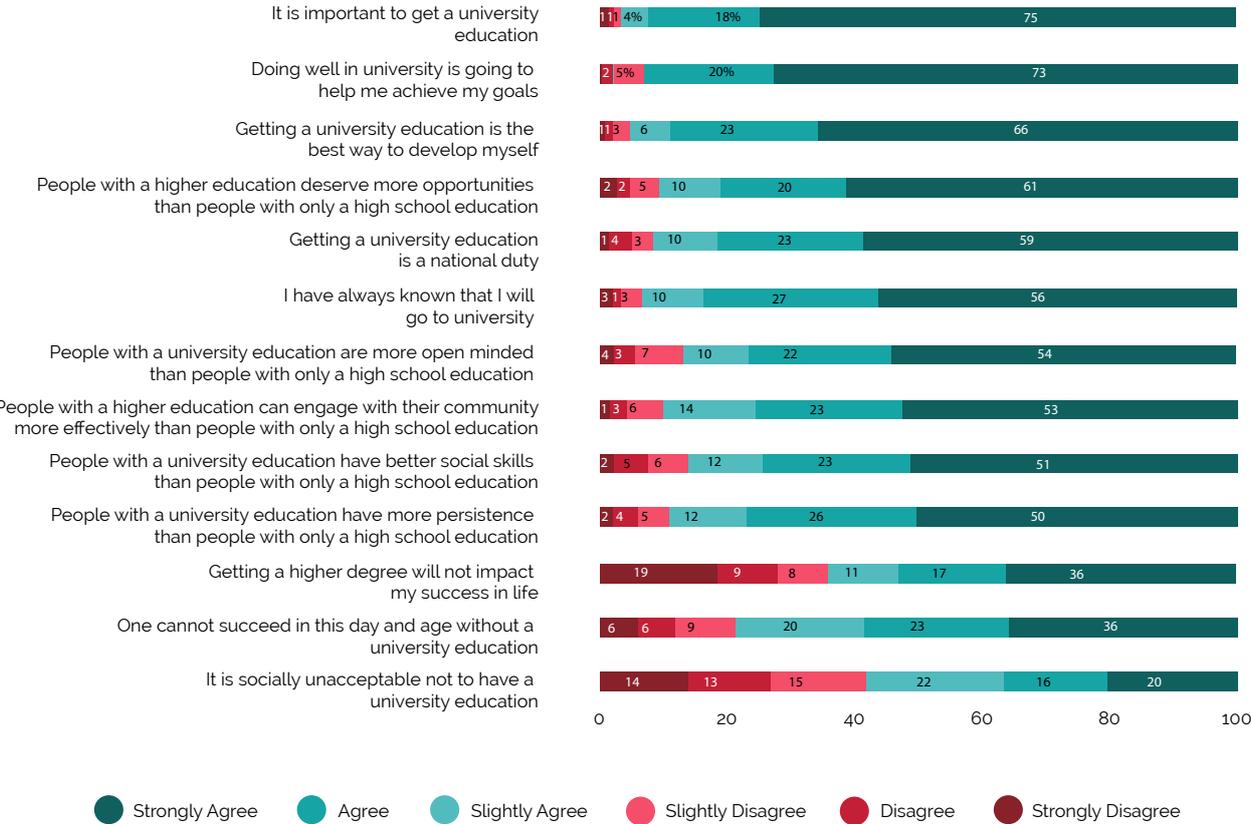


Figure 6. Attitudes Toward University Education

There was a significant correlation between parental encouragement of university attendance and the belief that no obstacles facing university access are insurmountable. Beliefs about the ability to overcome hurdles to accessibility of education ($r=-.28$), the convenience of attending university ($r=-.145$) and the time available to do so ($r=-.192$) were significantly correlated with intention to apply to university ($r=-.208$). This indicates that the belief that accessing university education is not a significant burden impacts students' desire to undertake education. As indicated in the literature, students who perceive the cost of attending education to be too high, in terms of time, money or convenience, are less likely to pursue education than those who see it as manageable.

Perceptions of University Accessibility

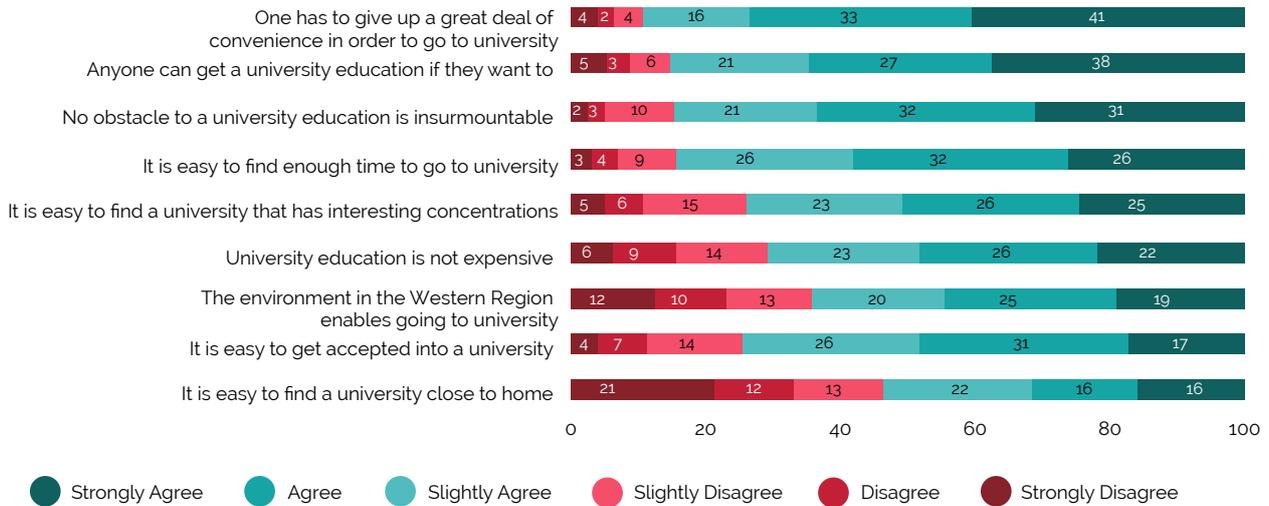


Figure 6. Perceptions of University Accessibility

Regarding their confidence in performing tasks related to applying and gaining entrance into universities, students displayed high levels of confidence. 80% of respondents indicated that they were confident that they could get support from their families to attend university. & 67% said that they were confident that they could locate information about the universities that they wish to attend. However, confidence levels regarding achieving the requisite English language scores to gain entry into university were lower than for the other items (42% of respondents said they were not confident that they could earn the required scores).

Confidence in Tasks Related to University Applications

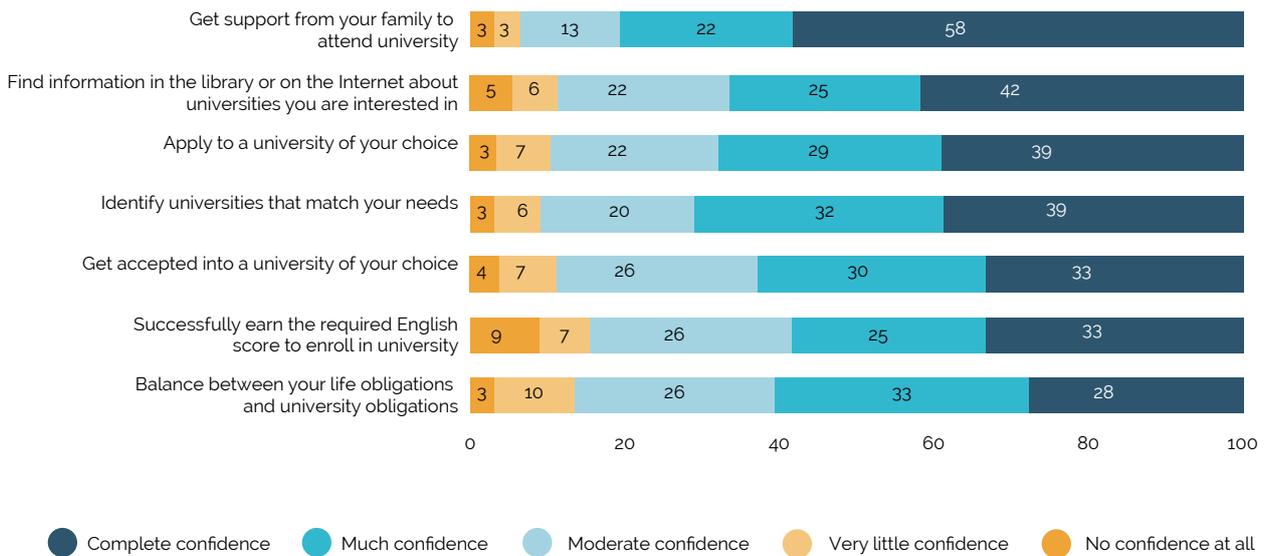


Figure 7. Confidence in Tasks Related to University Applications

Linear regression analysis indicated a significant relationship between confidence in getting support from family members and intention to apply to university whereby as confidence levels decrease, so does the likelihood that respondents will choose to apply to university ($t=-4, p=0.002$). Overall, confidence in their ability to perform tasks related to applying to university impacted student intentions to attend university. Confidence in their ability to get in ($r=-.222$), earn the requisite English language score $r=(-.191)$, and identify the right university ($r=-.369$) correlated with intentions to pursue higher education. This indicates that when students feel that they have the ability and the support to go to university, they show interest in doing so.

Familial Support Related to Travel for University

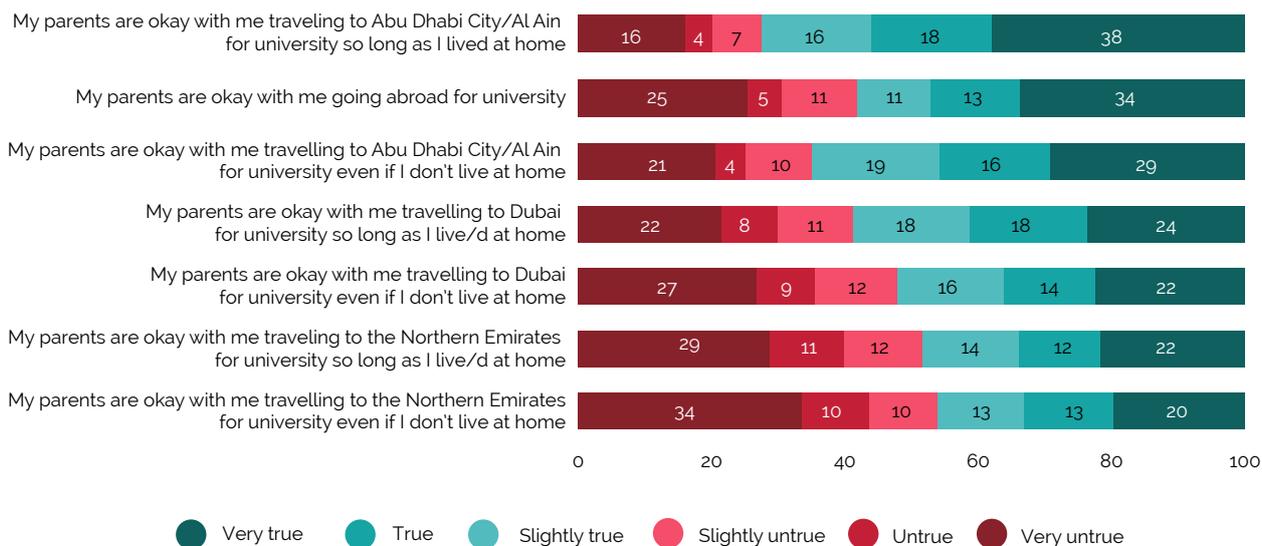


Figure 8. Familial Support Related to Access to University

Girls' Perception of Familial Support for Travel for University

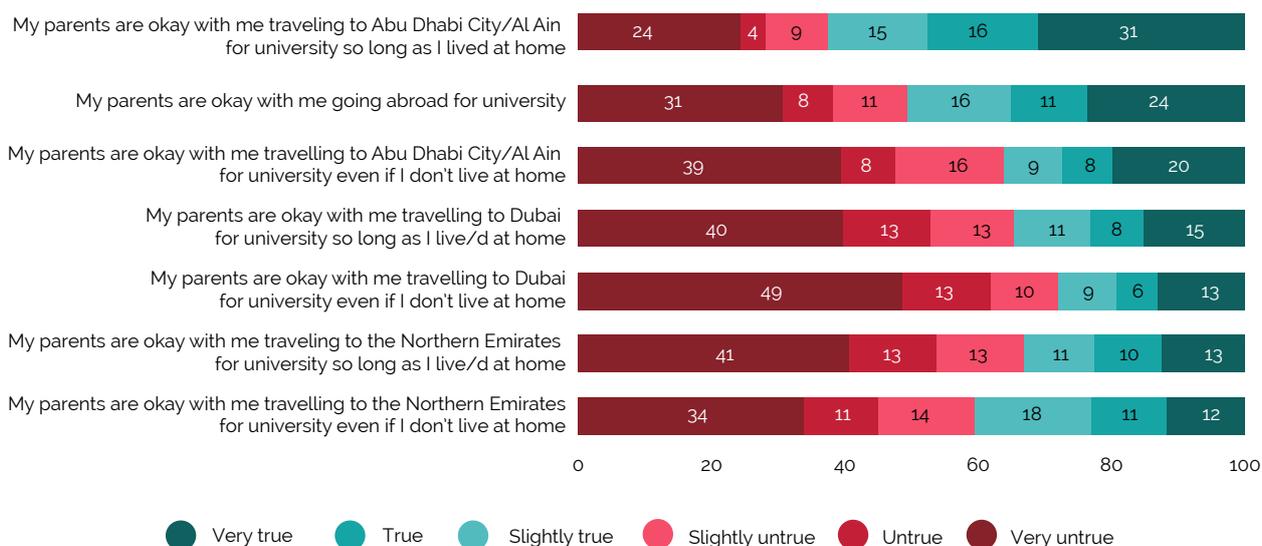


Figure 9. Girls' Perceptions of Familial Support for Travel for University

While most respondents were confident that they could get support from their families to attend university, a smaller proportion of them believed that their parents would permit them to go university outside of the Western Region. However, girls more than boys believed that they would not be allowed to travel outside of the Western Region for university. This was in line with findings in qualitative data that indicated that girls, more than boys, faced mobility challenges and cultural taboos against traveling to universities outside of the region. There were significant correlations between students' being allowed to travel to Abu Dhabi City or Al Ain and intention to apply to university ($r=-.123$). This implies that students who perceived themselves as able to go to universities in Abu Dhabi were more likely to apply to university.

Experiences with Secondary Education

Students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their high school's facilities and educational resources. By and large, student were satisfied with their school facilities. In particular, respondents were most satisfied with their computer labs (68%) and science labs (70%). A considerable minority in our sample reported not having art rooms (30%) or music rooms (38%). Among those who do have those facilities, satisfaction with art and music facilities was lower than with other facilities. More boys than girls reported being satisfied with their school's gymnasium and science labs, while more girls than boys reported being satisfied with their computer labs and classrooms.

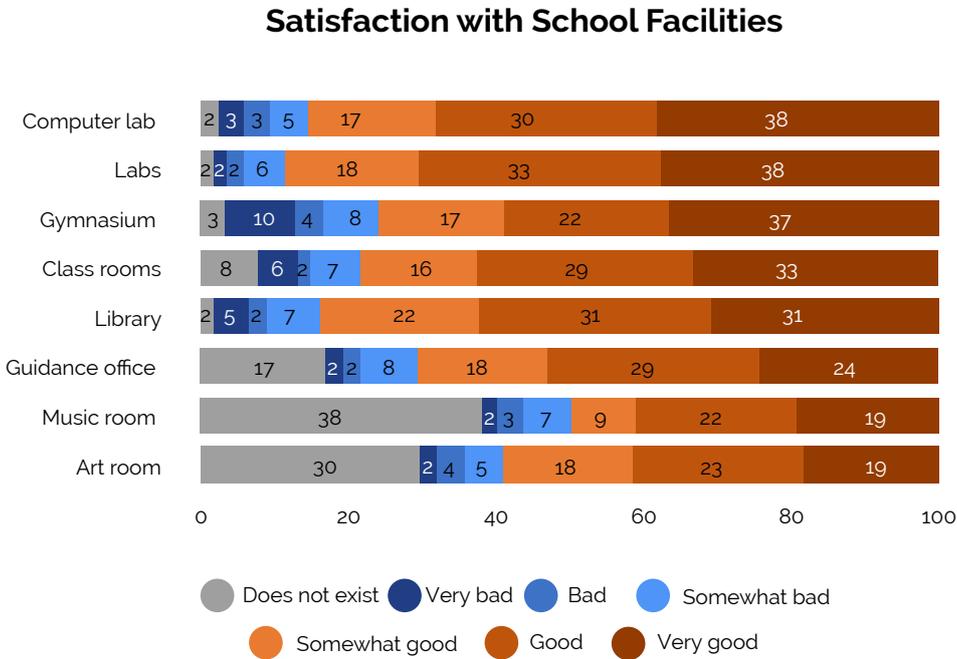


Figure 10. Satisfaction with School Facilities

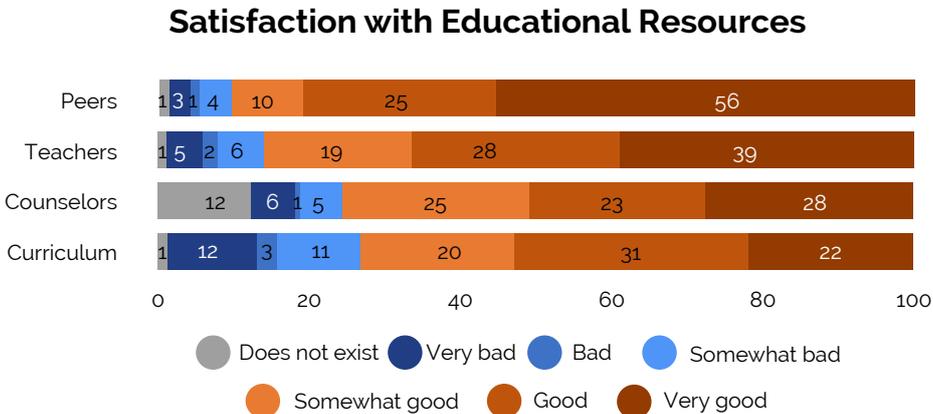


Figure 11. Satisfaction with Educational Resources

Regarding their satisfaction with teaching staff, students reported being satisfied (67%). When asked about their peers, 81% said that they were good or very good. 53% of students identified their curriculum as good or very good. When asked about their peers, 81% said that they were good or very good. 53% of students identified their curriculum as good or very good. With regard to guidance counselors, 12% of students said that they did not exist, and 12% of students said that they were bad, very bad, or somewhat bad. 76% of students identified their counselors as being good.

The majority of students believed that their schooling prepared them for university. 48% said that their school education prepared them with a good foundation in English, 68% said that their school education prepared them with good foundations in the sciences, and 70% said that they were equipped with strong foundation in the humanities. Regression analysis suggested a strong relationship between reports of strong foundations in the humanities and students' confidence in tasks related to finding employment such as interviewing, writing resumes, and identifying careers ($t=2.8, p=0.004$). Correlation analysis indicated that the rigor of curricula and the degree that students thought that they had been prepared to undertake a university education influenced their intentions to apply to university. Significant correlations existed between the degree to which students thought their curriculum was rigorous, the degree to which they thought they had good foundations in English and their intention to apply to university.

Preparedness for University Education

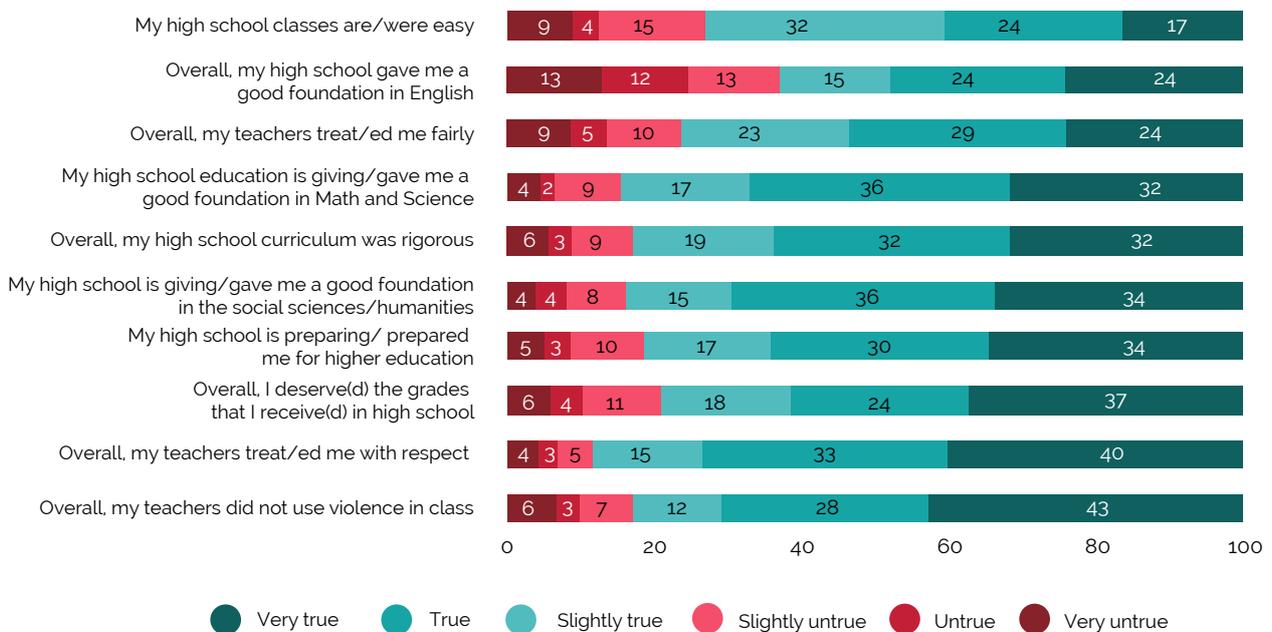


Figure 12. Perceptions of preparedness for university education

When asked about their expectations for success in school, 86% of respondents reported believing that they are able to do well in the high school classes. 83% of respondents believed that they could learn the material in their high school classes, and 81% believed that they could understand the material in their high school classes. In general, expectancy of success among respondents was high. Linear regression analysis indicated that students' perceptions of the rigour of their curricula and the degree to which they were equipped with adequate foundational skills impacted their expectancy of success. The more that a student believed that they were adequately prepared with good foundations in the humanities and social sciences, the more they expected to succeed in school ($t=5.2, p=0.000$). Similarly the less confidence a student had that they were equipped with adequate foundations in English, the lower their expectancy score was ($t=-3.27, p = .001$). This indicates that perceptions of the standards of education impact students' confidence in their abilities to succeed in school. Another important factor impacting students' expectations of success in school was their perception of the respect accorded to them by their teachers. Regression analysis suggested that the more that a student perceived their teacher as respectful toward them, the more they expected to succeed in school ($t=2.9, p=.004$).

Expectancy - Value- Cost Scale

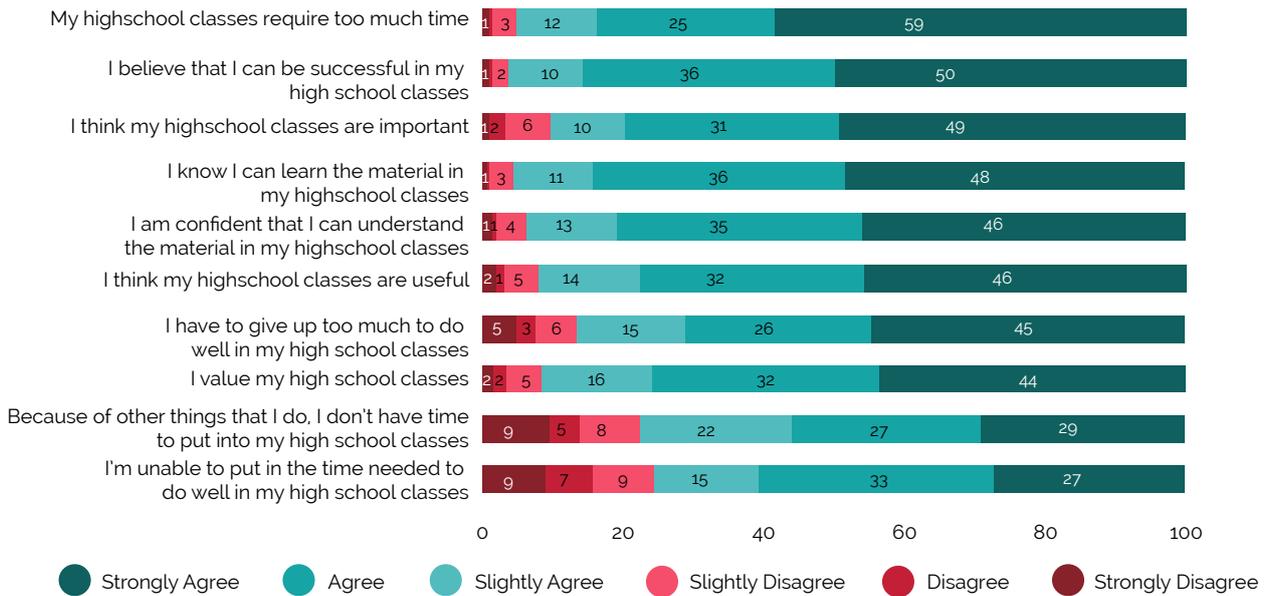


Figure 13. Expectancy, value, cost scale.

The degree to which parents emphasized the significance of achieving academic goals and performing well in class (parent-goal-emphasis) positively influenced the degree to which students expected to succeed in school ($t=2.9, p=.004$). High expectancy scores were correlated with intention to apply to university ($r=-.167$). Indicating that students' confidence in their ability to perform in school influences their desire to pursue higher education.

Significant relationships were also found between the rigour of high school curricula, perceived preparedness, and value of education. Overall, perceived value of their high school education was high among respondents. 80% of respondents believed that their high school education was important. 78% believed their high school classes were useful and 76% reported that they valued their high school classes.

Significant relationships exist between students' perceptions that they are prepared for university education ($r=.514$), the degree to which they feel they have an adequate foundation in math and science ($r=.397$), and English ($r=.198$) and the degree to which students valued their education. Furthermore, the perceptions of the rigour ($r=.286$) of curricula and fair and respectful treatment in the classroom impacted the value students placed on their high school studies. Again, parental involvement also played a significant role here whereby the degree with which students valued their educations correlated significantly with the degree to which their parents emphasized the importance of achieving educational goals ($r=.153$).

As with expectancy, the value students placed on their education correlated ($r=-.194$) with their intentions to apply to university.

This tells us that the quality of curricula and instruction at schools is not just important for the value that is provided in knowledge and skills, but also in the attitude it bestows on students. Students with high quality curricula are more likely to be engaged, find their education to be valuable, and to expect that they can succeed at their school work. These indications of expectancy and value are correlated with the intention to go to university. As such, it is fair to say that the quality of schooling that students receive impacts their intentions to pursue higher education in the long term.

As for cost, 84% of students believed that their classes require too much time. 71% said that they have to give up too much to do well in their high school classes. 60% of respondents said they were unable to invest the necessary time to do well in their high school classes and 56% of respondents reported being unable to take time away from the other things that they do in order to do well in class.

Parental Involvement

Overall, and contrary to observations by teachers and principals, parents placed a strong emphasis on the value of education and on doing well in school. 81% of respondents reported that their parents would like them to show others that they are good at their classwork. 80% reported that their parents thought that it was important to get the right answers in class and 65% said that their parents don't like it when they make mistakes in class.

As mentioned earlier, parental goal emphasis influences students' perceptions of the value of their education as well as of their expectation to succeed. Student attitudes are impacted by their parents' attitudes toward education such that the degree to which parents emphasize the importance of doing well in school impacts students' perception of whether or not university is important ($r=.154$), whether it impacts one's success in life ($r=-.007$) and the degree to which it is essential for survival ($r=.114$). In general, the relationship between parents' education, their values and those of their children is strong.

Overall, respondents also reported that their parents regularly engaged them and encouraged them to pursue higher education. 83% of respondents said that their fathers encouraged them to go to university and 72% said that their fathers think it is important for them to be employed. 59% said that their fathers spent a lot of time with them. Only 28% of respondents said that their father was not interested in how they performed in school. Mothers received slightly higher scores in parental involvement. 86% of respondents said that their mothers encouraged them to go to university. 80% said that their mothers thought it was important for them to be employed. 85% of respondents said that their mother spends a lot of time with them. Only 25% of respondents said that their mother was not interested in how they performed in school.

Once again, the degree to which parents engaged with their children on subjects related to their schooling or their careers, was significantly correlated with students' positive attitudes toward education. Furthermore, there was a predictive relationship between father's emphasis on employment and intention to go to university ($t=2.8$, $p=0.000$). Overall, parents' engagement with their children correlated with students' intention to apply to university.

Parental Goal Emphasis Scale

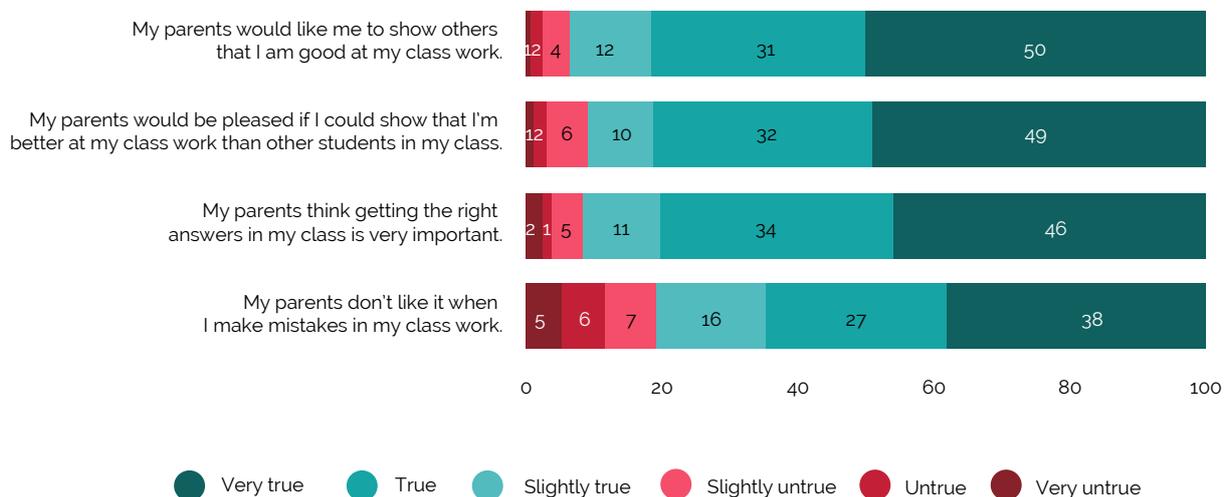


Figure 14. Parental goal emphasis scale

Parental Involvement: Father

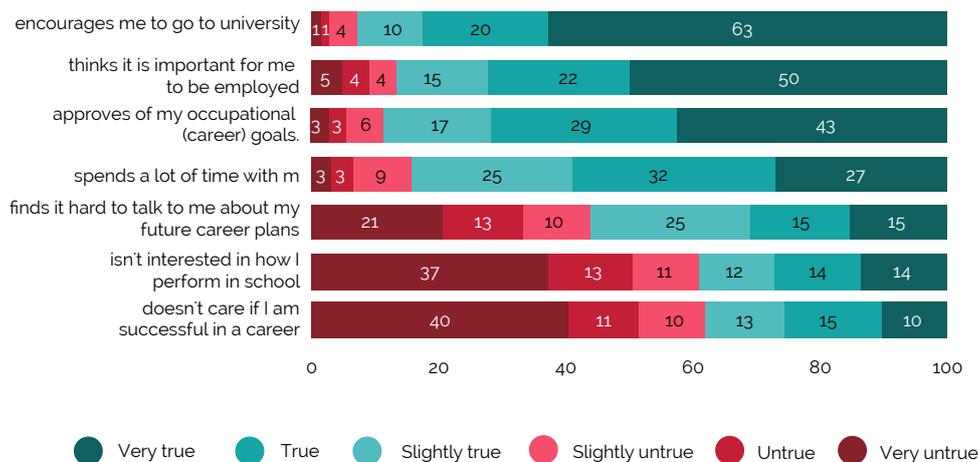


Figure 15. Parental involvement: Father

Parental Involvement: Mother

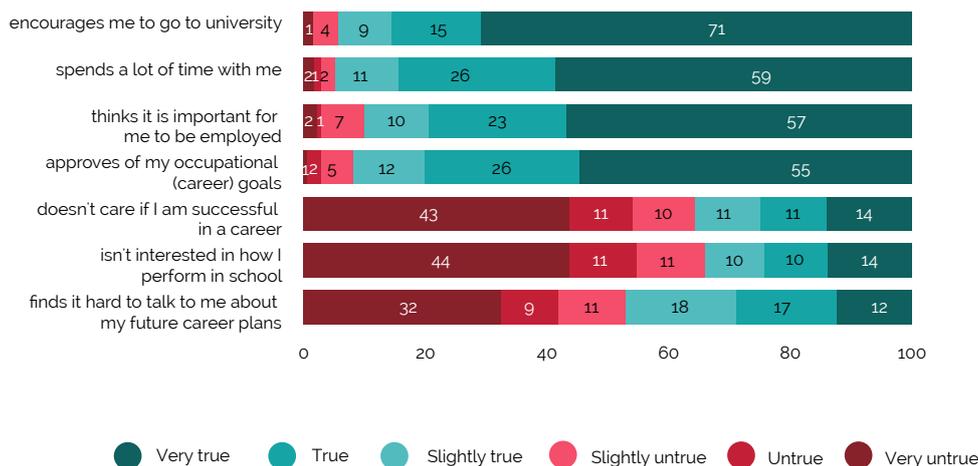


Figure 15. Parental involvement: Mother

Intention to Apply to University

The large majority of students indicated that they intend to apply to university (62%) and another substantial proportion indicated that they will probably apply to university (24%). Only 14% of respondents said that they either will not apply to university or were not sure.

When asked about the factors that influence their decision to apply to university, 78% said they wanted to go to university to improve their job opportunities, 77% said they were doing so to attain social status and 70% said they were doing so to get promoted. In general, there was an agreement among the respondents that university attainment is a facilitator of job success as well as social benefit. However, while they felt that most of the factors were influential, some were more influential than others.

Overall, the factors that were the most influential were those related to social status and job opportunities. This is in line with the factors that emerged from our qualitative data. Students with whom we spoke felt strongly that university education was the best way to develop their skills and chose to go to university primarily to ensure that they will achieve their highest potentials. Social status and attaining social skills was also a prominent theme that emerged in our interviews. Young men and women were aware of the lack of education among the older generations in their communities and equated, to some

degree, lack of education with the past and education with the present and the future. For them, social status, as an educated person, was an important byproduct of attaining a university degree.

In terms of individuals who were most influential in the decision making processes of students, parents and families seem to play a very important role in students' choices to attend university. Over 50% of our respondents reported that it was their family members, whether parents, siblings or extended families, that influenced their choices regarding higher education.

Intention to Apply to University

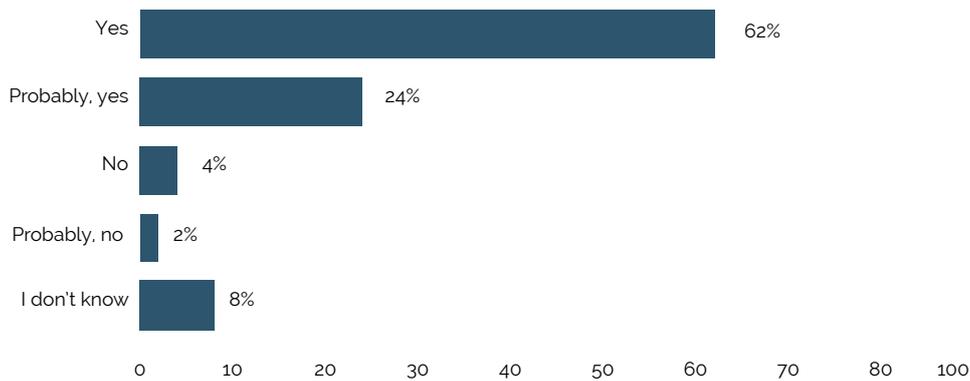


Figure 16. Intention to apply to university

Factors Influencing Student Decisions to Apply to University

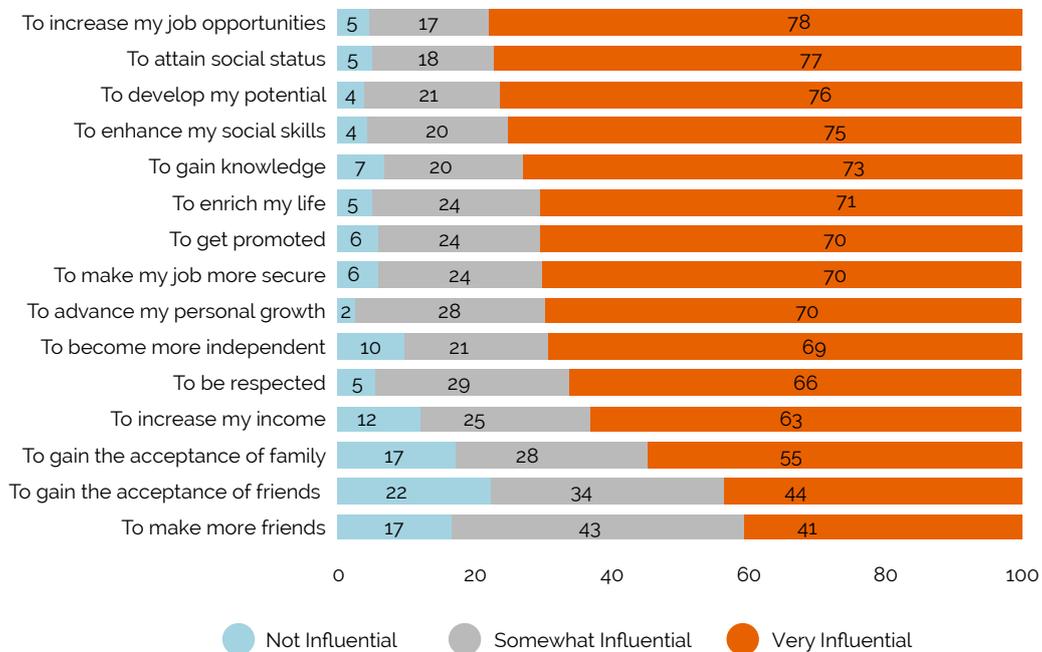


Figure 17. Factors influencing decisions to apply to university

Despite being few, students who decided not to attend university were asked about the factors that influenced their decisions not to attend.

The most influential reasons associated with not pursuing a higher degree were those related to employment and family obligations. The first most influential was the need for employment, followed by work obligations and that they already had a job. Following employment related reasons, students cited low grades, lack of English language requisites and the perception that university is hard. Overall, the most influential reasons are related to the need to be employed followed by the perception that one could not get into university or that it would be too difficult once there.

Factors Influencing Student Decisions Not to Apply to University

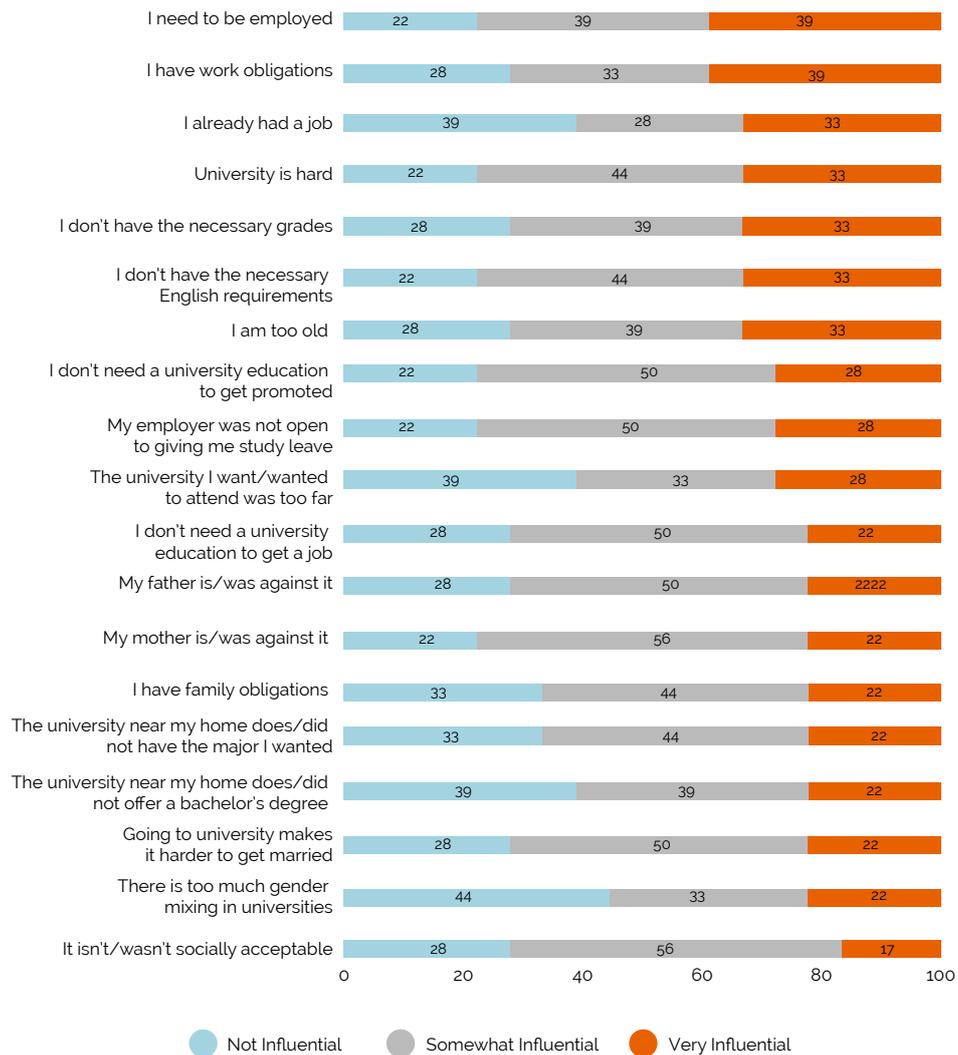


Figure 18. Factors influencing decisions not to apply to university

Intention To Seek Employment

When asked if they plan to seek employment in the future, 61% of respondents said they do and 16% said that they probably do.

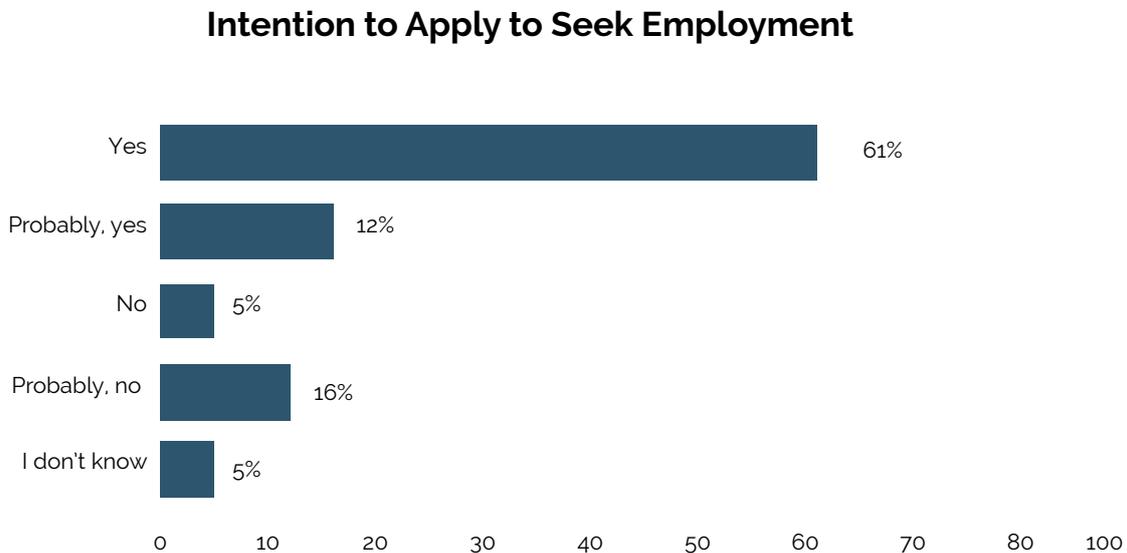


Figure 19. Factors influencing decisions not to apply to university

The most preferred industries for employment amongst high school students were oil and gas, national defense, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, construction and engineering, public services and government, and education. Unsurprisingly, the industries most preferred by students are those that are the most dominant and prominent in the region.

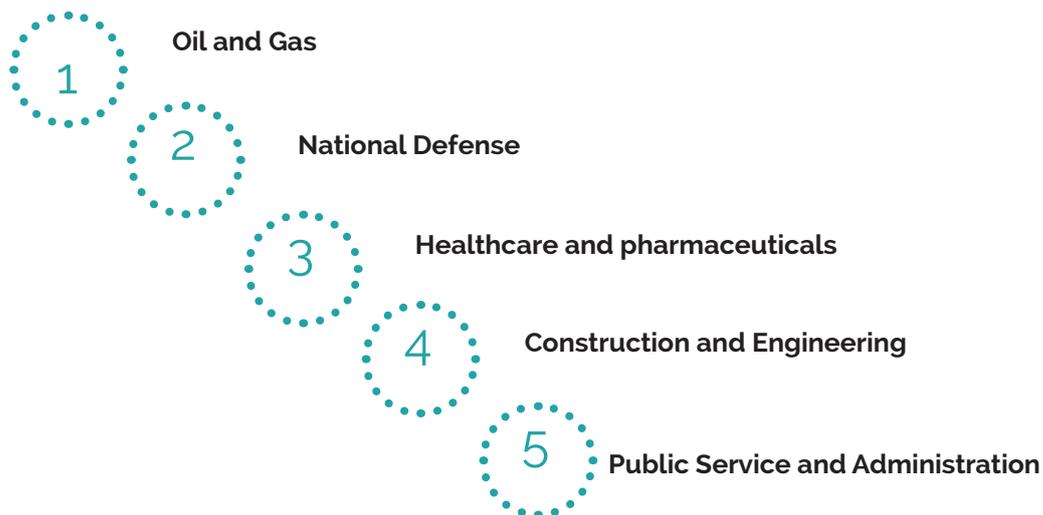


Figure 20. Ranking of preferred sectors for employment

Overall, as with youth in the rest of the UAE, youth perceived public sector jobs to be more stable and more flexible than private sector jobs. There was agreement that it is easier to get promoted in government than the private sector. The private sector was also viewed to be a difficult sector for women to work in and one that is somewhat incompatible with the culture of respondents. One of the reasons this may be the case is because the private sector in the Western Region is currently limited and the

companies that students are most exposed to are those in energy, construction and manufacturing. These sectors are notoriously difficult to work in and struggle to attract young people all over the world because of the necessity of field work and the technical nature of the work involved.

Perceptions about the Private and Public Sectors

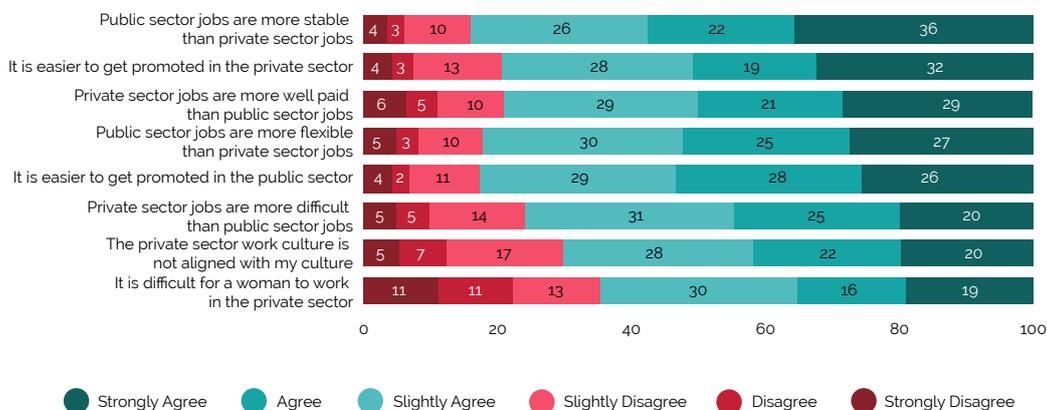


Figure 22. Perceptions of the private and public sectors

By and large students had very high expectations of their monthly earnings. 46% of respondents said that they expect to be paid over 45,000 AED in their next, or in the case of the majority of respondents, first job. This is reflective of the current labour market in the Western Region. Students who are exposed to siblings or cousins in the workforce are aware of the salaries that are available.

Expected Monthly Income

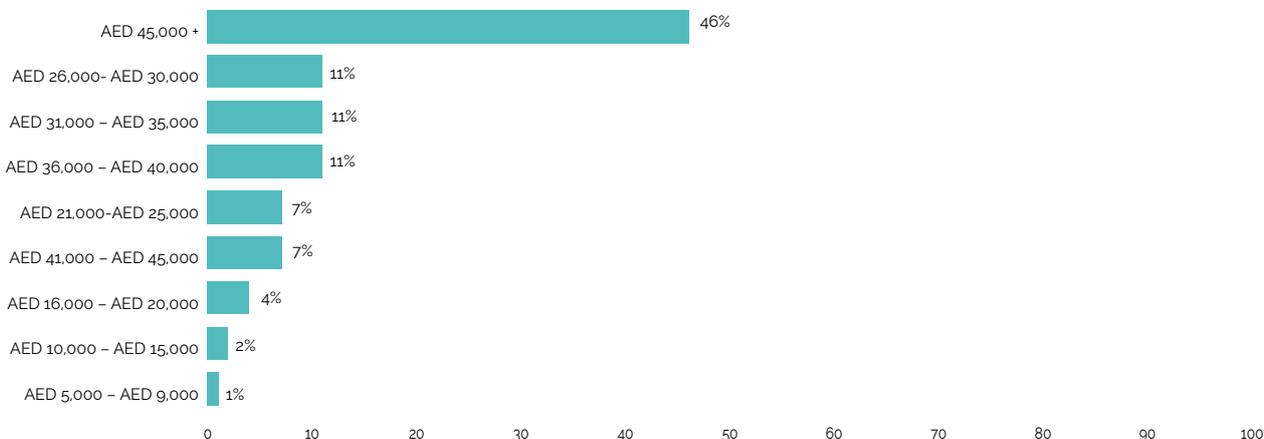


Figure 23. Expected monthly income

Regarding the fairness of employment practices, 67% of respondents said that they believed that their tribal affiliation would impact their chances of getting a job. 56% said that they believed that family connections influenced their chances of getting a job and 52% said that they believed that their gender would impact their chances of getting a job. 43% of respondents believed that it was not acceptable for women to work in an environment with men and 52% of respondents said that they believed that it was difficult for women to work in an environment with men. This is in line with data collected in our interviews whereby women indicated that there was stigma around women’s mixing with men. They also indicated that it was difficult for women to work in environments with many men in them because of the limitations placed on interaction and because of the resulting discomfort. However, they also indicated that it was difficult nowadays to find an office without some or many women employees. While interviewees

reported that standards of segregation are slowly changing due to demands of the workplace, young and old men alike indicated that it was important for them to make sure that their wives and sisters did not mix with other men.

Perception of the Fairness of Hiring Practices

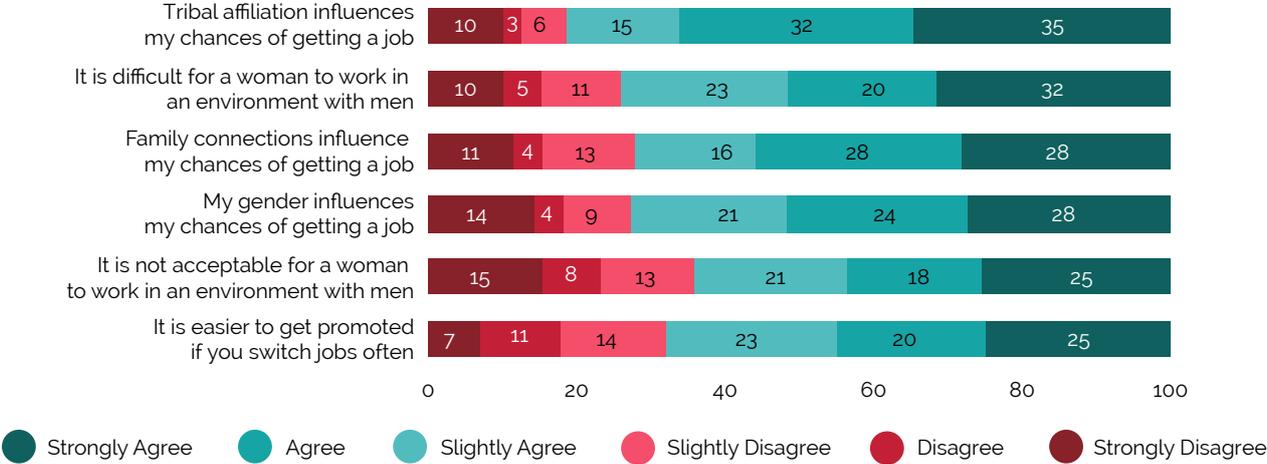
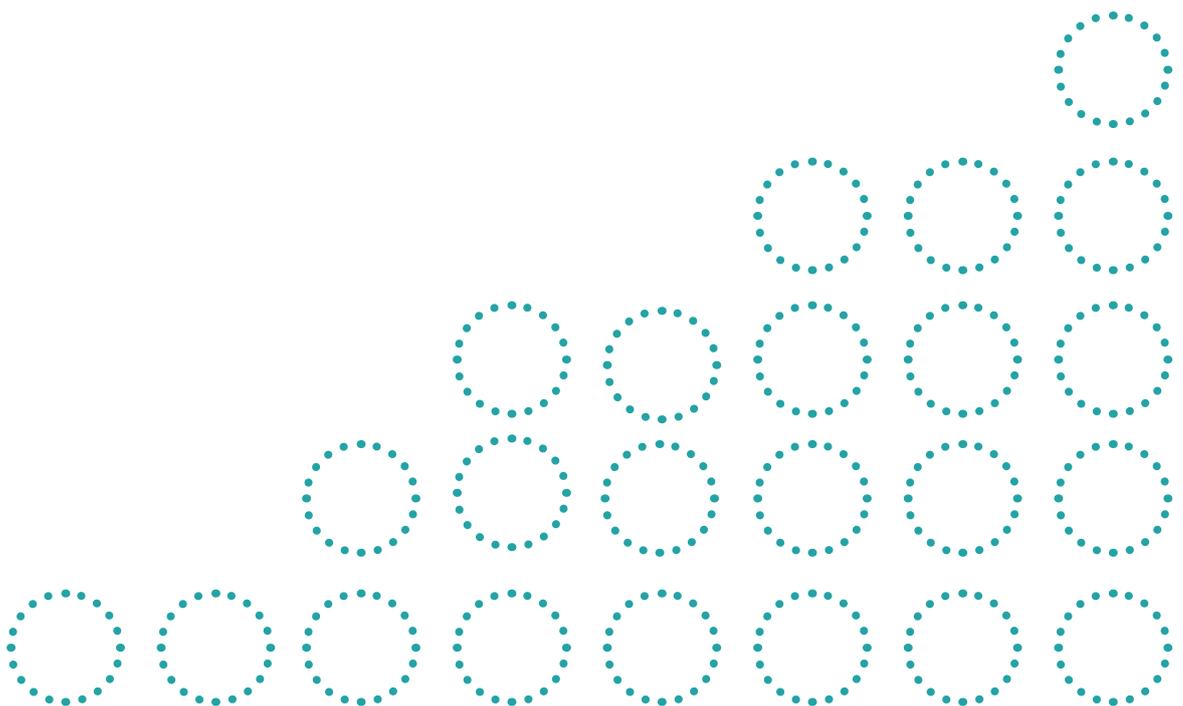


Figure 24. Perception of the fairness of hiring practices

5

HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: INTERVIEWS WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND RECENT GRADUATES



INTERVIEWS WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND RECENT GRADUATES

Many important themes emerged from our interviews with youth. Overall, interviewees demonstrated an enthusiasm for education and a desire to utilize their skills and knowledge to serve the Western Region. For most, migrating away from the region was not desirable, even if it was possible. For men, more than women, options for travel to university or for work were widely available, though the inconvenience caused by distance and dangerous roads made this an undesirable option. For women, traveling to university was socially unacceptable and their choices were constrained by fathers or brothers. The women who were able to convince their families to allow them to travel for university reported doing so carefully and over time, with great persistence.

The limited choices of university concentrations were especially disappointing to the young people with whom we spoke, though those on the older end of the spectrum thought that educational opportunities had expanded a great deal since they were young. For that group (those above the age of 26) participation in higher education was something they did later in life. Before the HCT and Baynounah Institute opened branches in Madinat Zayed and Al Ruwais, youth had no local university options. Women were especially impacted by this. Even among the young women, university attainment was limited to a higher diploma due to the previously limited offerings. Additionally, 3 of the women we interviewed (below the age of 30) reported completing their high school education in an adult learning facility. This indicates that educational opportunities, even for youth, are variant and dependent on economic background, gender, and familial attitudes.

Familial influence on choice to enroll in university

All of our interviewees, without exception, cited familial influence as a main factor in their decisions to go to university or gain employment. Even when parents were not involved, a family member, such as an older sibling had, not only influence on their choices, but in most cases, permitted or prohibited them. For women, this influence was even more pronounced. For many of them, fathers played a significant role in encouraging them to pursue their educations or get jobs. The women we spoke to were clear that, had it not been for their familial support, they would not be employed.

Education as a facilitator of employment and promotion

Education was, for many, a means to an end. All interviewees acknowledged that, while they could get a job with only a high school education, a university education was now necessary for high paying and managerial posts. Roughly 60% of the interviewees were employed during or before receiving their university education. They indicated that going to university was a way for them to get promoted at work.

Education as a way to attain social status

Education was talked about, by all of our interviewees, as a civilizing agent. They saw those who were educated as being of a higher social status and as exhibiting characteristics of a more "civilized" people. They talked about how educated people are more polite, speak better, have broader horizons, stay away from "backwardness" and are overall more agreeable. They believed that their educations would elevate them socially.

Education as a way to develop the self

The third most common way in which education was discussed was as a tool for self-development. Women in particular talked about education as a way to better themselves and to achieve their potentials and higher purpose. Education was also seen as a way to develop the self in order to develop the community. Many of the women we talked to, believed that their educations not only helped them become better people, but would also help them to raise better children and to build stronger communities. The men, too, talked about how women should be encouraged to learn in order to rear educated children and build a stronger society. Even if a woman does not work after she is married, something they saw as preferable, her education would spill over to her children and serve her family.

Poor English language foundations

All of our interviewees said that they had a poor English language foundation before entering university and cited that as a significant barrier. Roughly 70% of our interviewees believed their schools could have done a better job of preparing them for university. Many finished high school completely unaware of the university application process, or of university entrance requirements. Additionally, upon entering university, many found that their math, science and language preparation was not adequate.

Standardized English language exams as a barrier to university entry

IELTS exams were seen as one of the main reasons why students either do not get into university or drop out. Many of our interviewees had experienced rejections or dropped out due to their English language proficiency. They also told many stories of friends and family members who spent 2 or more years trying to attain the appropriate IELTS scores before finally giving up and dropping out. One of our interviewees, who had taken a break from her university career, said that she had spent two years in foundations courses trying to achieve the appropriate IELTS scores. After her most recent attempt, she opted to take some time off to work and return to her university education when she was ready to pass the IELTS.

Low awareness of university opportunities

Awareness of university choices prior to enrollment was low according to our interviewees. They said that, prior to enrolment, they did not know much about the universities in the region or about the majors that were offered. Regarding university visits to their schools, they indicated that in their three years in high school, they were invited once to one of those visits. While universities visit their schools every year, not every class or every student is invited to attend. Instead, noted our interviewees, teachers tended to view these visits as an optional activity. Only those students who had a "free period" or whose teachers had completed curricular requirements were encouraged to go.

Restrictions on women's educational opportunities

Familial restrictions were discussed at length by both men and women in our interviews. Familial restrictions were said to be the main reason why women in the Western Region are confined to that geographic area and do not travel to Abu Dhabi city or others for study. The men on the other hand, are said to leave for Abu Dhabi or Dubai in droves. Educators confirmed that Western Region men largely leave the region for study and so classrooms in the men's HCT are often empty. Women, however, do not have this luxury.

Women reported heavy monitoring of their activities and strict segregation between men and women. While the women we interviewed told us that their families allowed them to work in mixed gender environments, they said that others in their community and among their peers were not so lucky. Women's employment in segregated environments, such as primary and secondary schools, was more acceptable.

Distance as a barrier to university access

Students who were in university in Abu Dhabi city or Al Ain, talked about the logistical difficulty of going to campus and coming back every evening. Most students in the Western Region are also employed (according to educators with whom we spoke) and so most classes they take are evening classes. The logistics of the commute were burdensome for our interviewees and required a great deal of dedication and planning. Even for those who were in the city, juggling employment, families, and university was not easy.

The interviewees who were attending or attended university in Abu Dhabi City and Al Ain reported having to go to work early in the morning and returning home only briefly before having to begin their journey to their universities. They reported limited time to spend with family and on leisure activities. The distance and logistics of travel necessitated the acceptance and support of many members of their social circles including family and employers whose buy-in was crucial.

Resource barriers and university limitations

Many students we talked to spoke of the disappointment they feel about the limitations of their choices for majors and concentrations. These students did indeed protest these limitations and attempt to agitate for broader offerings. However, while these protests were met with sympathy, university administrators communicated to students that the low number of students in Western Region universities meant that broadening offerings would be costly and ineffective. Students who attempted to recruit others in order to drum up support for a course or concentration were disappointed to discover that they were unable to do so.

Employment as a road to independence

Most of the young people with whom we spoke were employed and two were seeking employment. Those who were employed were employed through-out their university years and before enrolling. Many also worked for several years before continuing on to higher education. When asked why, they said that they wished to be financially independent. More than one of them said that it did not "feel right" for them to take money from their parents. For others, the financial situation of their families pushed them to work.

Expectations for employment

Despite some interviewees needing to work to sustain themselves and their families, salary expectations were very high. If they had a university degree, interviewees expected to get jobs that paid AED 35,000 – 40,000 per month and if they did not, they expected at least AED 20,000 per month. Interviewees discussed methods, or what they called "tricks", for gaining promotion including hopping between departments or changing jobs. Getting a higher education was among them. Interviewees expected to be promoted every 1-2 years and aspired to have managerial positions. They viewed the public sector as more fair and stable, but the private sector as better for promotions and workplace rewards.

The employment market

Our interviewees were either currently government employees or young people who have been sponsored by energy companies, including ADNOC, and were looking to work in the energy sector. For many, they expressed the desire for more diverse opportunities but also felt that this was all that was available. Moreover, it was clear that the packages offered by some of the companies in the region were very enticing for these young people, and so many of them flocked to those offers as the only rational choice. The government employer with whom we spoke said that, on average, all of their employees come from one university and have been in the same two majors. This is leading to what, they think, is a skill gap. Engineering students go to the energy sector, and they are left with students in IT or business.

Educational Sponsorships

Educational sponsorships are very common in the Western Region as in other parts of the country. Students were well compensated for their time in university and promised high salaries upon graduation. Interviewees were savvy about what companies offered, with the benchmark being ADNOC, and the requirements that would get them better or worse compensation (such as GPA). Our interviewees did tell stories of how students who dropped out because of English or other requirements had to pay back large sums of money to the sponsors. While it is lucrative for students, there was a worry that it may turn into a financial burden if one was to fail out of university.

Entrepreneurial intent

80% of our interviewees said that they intended to, or already did, start an enterprise of their own. They did so alongside schooling or employment. However, the idea of what that might mean seemed variable. Some women said they owned their own businesses in which they sold home-made crafts or food items. Even the businesses proposed or run by the men were largely lifestyle businesses.

Entrepreneurial landscape in the Western Region

Female interviewees were more keen to start businesses in the Western Region than male ones. They talked about social ills that they could help to cure. The male interviewees, on the other hand, told us that the Western Region was too small of a geographic area and that no business can truly thrive there. Therefore, many of them already have or intend to take their businesses to Abu Dhabi or Dubai.

INTERVIEWS WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Conversations with university directors emphasized the difficulty of setting up and running a university in the Western Region. The small size of the university-going population in the region made it difficult to attract enough students to justify the costs of setting up programmes and concentrations. It is for that reason that university offerings tend to be limited in the region.

Female students tended to attend universities in the Western Region at larger numbers than the men. The men, we were told, typically attended university outside of the region and so programmes that were running in the men's universities were often attended by only a handful of students. Furthermore, attracting and retaining qualified faculty in the region posed a special challenge. For some universities, shuttles to and from the region are available so that staff can live and work in Abu Dhabi City. Logistical issues such as the absence of viable real estate for housing for staff members, as well as long distances and dangerous roads, posed difficulties for universities in the region.

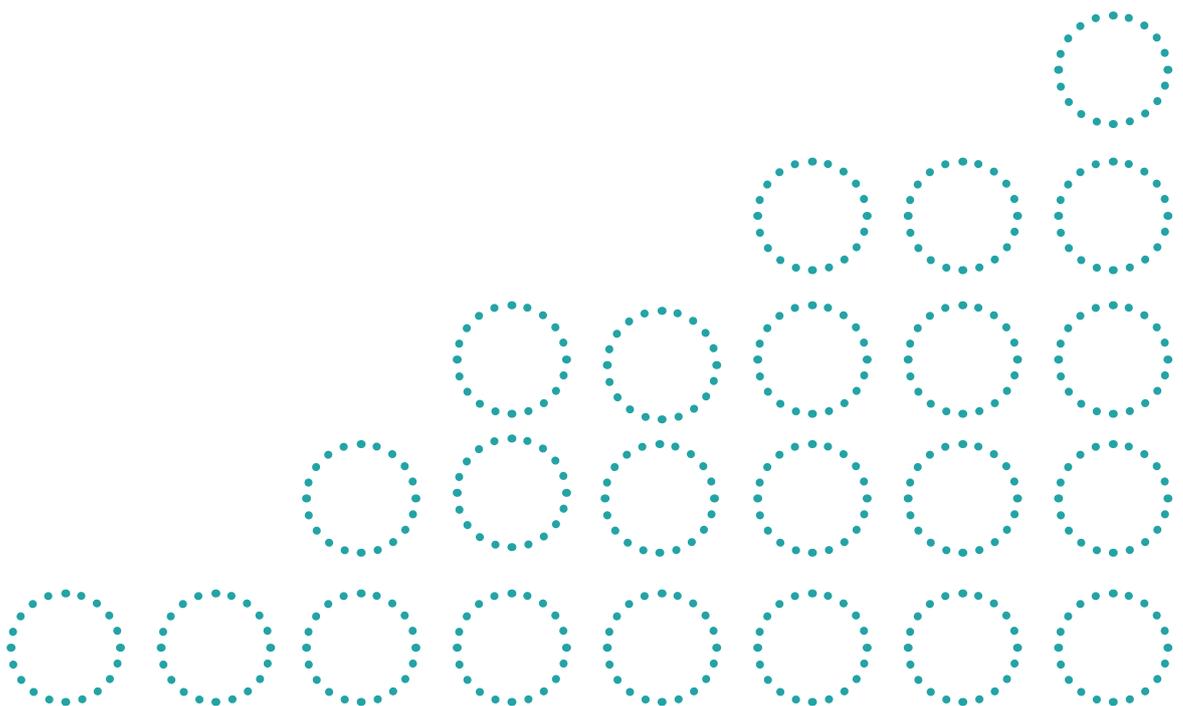
Another significant challenge facing universities is the low levels of preparation exhibited by incoming students. Large proportions of university budgets go toward running foundation programs that end up being no more than IELTS preparation courses. Not only are students not fluent in English and attending English medium or bilingual programs, but they exhibit low levels of preparation in other subjects such as math and science as well.

Connections between universities in the region and labour market actors are strong. Committees were set up by the major universities in the region that regularly convened with industry players to ascertain the needs of the market and to build programs that served those needs. For some universities, programs that are the most useful to industry receive special attention and support by those industry players in the form of scholarship programs, sponsorships for students and other inter-institutional arrangements. Administrators indicated that the large majority of their graduates are either already employed or easily find employment opportunities as soon as they graduate.

Administrators emphasized that students in region are enthusiastic and eager for opportunities. However, the circumstances of the area, as well as the failings of the secondary school system, have presented hurdles that require innovative solutions.

6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



CONCLUSIONS

The Western Region presents a unique context for both employers as well as educators. The rich heritage of the region has made it culturally significant for Abu Dhabi and the UAE. Additionally, due to its vast natural resources and oil and gas reserves, it plays a crucial role in the nation's economy. For this reason, major investments have been made in developing human capital in the region.

Despite its significance, the region suffers from an educational and employment gap that can be attributed primarily to the remote nature of the region and then to the limited labour market.

While jobs abound in the region, the demand for capable Emiratis means that young people need not invest in university educations in order to benefit from labour market opportunities. Instead, most young people get jobs before they begin their university careers. Due to these circumstances, education becomes a means to an end – usually a promotion or a more senior position. For those who wish to climb up the ladder, university makes that possible. For everyone else, a university education is not necessary for labour participation nor for earning decent wages.

Education in the region is perfectly geared toward the major industries in the area – primarily oil and gas, manufacturing and public service. The limitations faced by universities as well as by industry has resulted in collaborations that limit the choices available to students. This has served the employment rates in the region well, though they contribute to the continued lack of economic diversity in the area.

Challenges to educational attainment begin in the secondary and primary levels. Lack of engaged parental involvement and the devaluing of schooling has led to primary and secondary school students who are unwilling or unable to engage with curricula. Once students fail to gain their foundational skills in primary school, secondary schools struggle to catch them up. Pressures to teach the centralized curriculum compete with the need to go back to the beginning and to teach students the basics where necessary.

Furthermore, the mismatch between student abilities and university entry exams and standards have meant that many students are either unable to gain entry into university or spend years in foundations courses in an attempt to achieve the requisite English language proficiency scores. These students are placed at a disadvantage by the language of instruction in major local universities.

Hiring qualified faculty poses a serious challenge for schools as well as universities. At the secondary level, schools have no control over their teacher selection and turnover among young teachers unfamiliar with the region is high. For universities, hiring qualified faculty that are willing to live and work in the region poses significant difficulties. The lack of real estate and other services further exacerbates the problem.

Our research has found that students in the region are enthusiastic, motivated, and keen to see development and diversity in the area. For most, their faith in the value of education is strong. Students believed that, while accessing university education is inconvenient, challenges to educational attainment can be surmounted. Additionally, they placed a high value on social and community development as well as on fulfilling their duties to the nation. As far as assessments of motivation are concerned, the drive to attain higher education was high among respondents. Confidence levels were also high, as was the value placed on education. While these indicators alone cannot tell us if these students have the skills or competence to succeed at attaining university educations, they do tell us that environmental barriers and poor educational ecosystems play a bigger part in the education and employment gap than individual drivers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving educational foundations for high school students:

High schools and not universities should take on the burden of preparing students for IELTS and other entrance exams and for preparing them for university education. Universities who are already strapped spend a great deal of their budgets on foundations courses, which for many, are IELTS preparation courses. This burden should be transferred to high schools which should ensure that students have the math, science, and language skills needed before entering university. This can be done by holding foundations classes and preparatory classes in high schools and not universities, and also by offering intensive courses in the last 2 years of school.

Providing alternative tracks for students who need further help before continuing on to secondary school:

Instead of burdening secondary school teachers with bridging the gap for students whose primary school education did not equip them with the necessary skills, a special supplementary curriculum could be developed for those students who need extra help. Teachers should be given the freedom to adjust those curricula to the individual needs to students who need curricular assistance.

Orienting new teachers and spreading awareness about the Western Region before teachers arrive at school:

New teachers should be provided with thorough orientations to the Western Region before they are permanently hired into schools. This will allow teachers to make informed choices about their commitments to teaching in the region and will reduce turnover. Additionally, teachers, especially foreign ones, should be made aware of the unique circumstances of the Western Region and the difficulties that some students may have with the English language.

Campaigns to raise awareness among parents about the importance of education as well as of parental involvement:

Parents need to become more aware of the benefits of education for their daughters and their sons, as well as the benefits of allowing their daughters to travel for an education, if that is what they wanted. Schools and other community outreach programs should encourage parents to invest in their daughters' and sons' futures and to become more involved in the day to day happenings of their schooling.

Distance learning options:

UAE universities could provide distance learning options to students in the Western Region that allow them to choose from more diverse majors and that cut down on their commutes. This also will provide more opportunities for those living in the more remote parts of the region. Collaborations between local universities and universities in Abu Dhabi or Dubai can allow students to use local facilities while partaking in regional educations.

Entrepreneurial training in universities:

Entrepreneurial intention seemed to be high among our small sample of interviewees. If this is indicative of the region, then universities should take the first step in educating students on good practice and on setting up a viable business. While interest is high, students seemed to still be focused on small business that are not scalable and have little impact. Providing such individuals with guidance through small workshops or a course might result in more impactful projects.

Entrepreneurial incubators in universities:

Universities can also act as an incubator for entrepreneurs where industry and universities can partner to provide space, resources, and training for burgeoning entrepreneurs in the region.

Encouraging more diversity:

Diversity should be encouraged in the region by inviting more companies and industries to sponsor university students or even entire concentrations in the local universities and by encouraging enterprise among residents in the region. Universities can build relationships with companies outside of the Western Region who may be willing, as part of their CSR initiatives, to fund students' tuitions or even fund pilot academic programs.

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