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Title

Women Enrolled in Postgraduate Education in Technical and Science Subjects: A Case Study of 10 UAE National Students

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Women Enrolled in Postgraduate Education in Technical and Science Subjects: A Case Study of 10 UAE National Students

تقديم النساء على الدراسة في مرحلة البكالوريوس في دولة الإمارات
العربية المتحدة على المجالات تقنية وعلمية: دراسة تضمنت عشر نساء
إماراتيات

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

Faculty of Business

of

The British University in Dubai

By

Sujit Sukumaran

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Professor Ashly H. Pinnington, Supervisor

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Abstract

This research presents the findings of a study of 10 Emirati female post graduate students from The British University in Dubai (BuiD), Khalifa University for Science and Technology, American University of Sharjah, Masdar Institute of Science and Technology and Abu Dhabi University in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It explores their views about the factors affecting their choice of post graduate educational courses at universities in UAE and how it has influenced their life and career aspirations. The research employs a narrative research methodology and the data was collected through interviews conducted with a sample of 10 post graduate female Emirati students from different disciplines encompassing MSc level degrees of Finance and Banking, Project Management, Civil Engineering, Information Technology, SDBE and Engineering Management. The literature review identifies the range of potential influences on the choice of post graduate education for Emirati women and considers different goals and aspirations in terms of employability and career development. The empirical research explores the gap between expectations and market realities of Emirati female students examining the obstacles and challenges they face post qualification in pursuing a career of their choice. Recommendations are provided for a range of stakeholders in the UAE society with the aim of promoting increased number of UAE women studying technical and science disciplines.

Key words: Women's Education, Women's Careers, Influences on Choice of Postgraduate Degree Study.

Word Count: 16,847

ملخص

يقدم هذا البحث نتائج دراسة أسباب تقديم عشر نساء إماراتيات على تخصصاتهن الحالية في مرحلة البكالوريوس، و هن من مجموعة جامعات مختلفة و هي الجامعة البريطانية في دبي، جامعة خليفة للعلوم و التكنولوجيا، الجامعة الشارقة الأمريكية، معهد مصدر للعلوم و التكنولوجيا، و جامعة أبوظبي. يعنى هذا البحث في دراسة الأسباب و المؤثرات التي تأثرن بهن هذه النساء خلال عملية اختيار التخصص المناسب لهن خلال مرحلة البكالوريوس في مختلف أقطار دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، و كيفية تأثير هذه العوامل على رؤيتهن لمستقبلهن المهني و الحياتي بشكل عام. تمت هذه الدراسة باستخدام نظام سردي بحثي و المعلومات تم جمعها من خلال مقابلات شخصية مع شريحة مكونة من عشر نساء إماراتيات مازلن في مرحلة البكالوريوس من مجموعة مختلفة من جامعات أكاديمية في الدولة، تقدمن على تخصصات مثل الإدارة المصرفية، الأموال و البنوك، إدارة المشاريع، الهندسة المدنية، التكنولوجيا المعلوماتية، الهندسة الإدارية. قد تبين أن هناك مجموعة من الأسباب التي تأثر على اختيار هذه النساء مجالات علمية مختلفة و ذلك لاختلاف الأهداف، المستقبل المهني، التطور و الصعود على سلال المراكز الوظيفية و غيره. يبين أيضا هذا البحث الثغرة بين التوقعات المبناة و الواقع في الحيات العملية الوظيفية للنساء الإماراتيات خلال تفحصهن للمصاعب و التحديات التي تواجههن في سبيل الالتحاق إلى ما تريدهن تحقيقه و تنفيذه. هناك توصيات مقدمه في هذه الدراسة لمختلف الإماراتيين ذوي المصلحة في تطوير و زيادة عدد النساء الإماراتيات في دولة في المجالات التقنية و العلمية.

الكلمات الدالة: التعليم للنساء، المستقبل المهني للنساء، المؤثرات على أسباب اختيار تخصص البكالوريوس.

عدد الكلمات: 16,847

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Women form a vital part of society across the world. Whether as homemakers or career women they play a pivotal role in ensuring that the homes that they live in as well as the people dependent on them are provided for as well as brought up in a cultured and highly progressive manner.

It is therefore important to stress upon the fact that the more educated, cultured and progressive the women in a particular country are, the more are the chances for a country to achieve economic and social advancement. While education alone does not necessarily ensure the empowerment and emancipation of a country's population and society, wherever initiatives have been taken and have succeeded to influence and mould the thought processes of the women of a country through education of a progressive nature, those nations have often been ahead economically.

Most modern and ancient literature, thinkers and social change catalysts have forever realized the potential role that educated and empowered women can play in the life and development of the society at large around them. The UAE in this regard has been no different. A relatively young nation, considering that it gained independence from the United Kingdom only 41 years ago, in the early 1970's, it has provided its women with a lot of support in the form of grants, scholarships and even special programs aimed at increasing women's participation in education and the workplace. However the fact still remains that despite much of assertive action in terms of policy and programs undertaken so far especially with respect to education, there is still a mismatch between education and ongoing employability of Emirati women.

This chasm, primarily relates to the disparity in the numbers of UAE women seeking and completing qualifications as against those that finally end up as part-

time or full-time employed personnel in the workforce may be attributable to different factors including culture, tradition, gender issues and stereotypes.

The research for this dissertation aims to identify how a group of Emirati women came to pursue postgraduate qualifications in technical and science subjects. What were the family, school, peer, higher education, media and work influences on their choices and how does a post graduate qualification support that one additional step in their career aspirations and development? The problem is investigated through a narrative research methodology.

1.2. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to investigate the factors affecting the choice of post graduate study courses among Emirati women. In order to achieve this research aim, four research objectives have been formulated, namely:

- Research objective #1 – to understand the factors influencing the choices of post graduate educational courses among Emirati women;
- Research objective #2 – to comprehend the driving influences from socio-economic and societal perspectives;
- Research objective #3 – to explore the expectations of students both pre- and post-education in addition to studying whether these are being met through higher education provision;
- Research objective #4 – to identify the barriers that make it difficult for Emirati women to be represented at work either due to institutional or self-imposed and societal constraints.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the key factors influencing the choice of post-graduate educational courses among Emirati women?
2. How do gender and societal influence affect the choice of education and subject specialisation?

3. What aspirations do these students have after completing their courses and do they feel that they receive same levels of organisational and social support as their male counterparts?

1.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

This research is important because it provides important insight into the educational preferences of Emirati women at the post-graduate level of study, the influences that drive them towards choosing these courses and what they intend to do with their lives post-qualification.

It also seeks to shed light on the impact of the social structure of Emirati families within the UAE, the environments that the students are brought up in and how the formative influences from their early childhood up until student age impact their home and work lives. One of the main reasons to examine this issue is that across the Arab world, with the UAE as a high GDP country of reference, women are developing a per capita education level that exceeds many developed nations in the world, but the fact still remains that their representation and relative success at the workplace even today after four decades of affirmative action and reformatory policy still leaves a lot to be desired.

This research also attempts to address the issue of gender differences and how this may impact the choice of education for example the idea that the more “technical” courses are obviously skewed towards a male student population while the “softer” courses which do not involve so much quantitative, technical expertise are more likely to be favoured by women.

Given the investigative nature of this research and the lack of specific UAE focused literature on the topic, it was decided to use a narrative research methodology based on the principles of qualitative research to ensure that the treatment of the problem of study was treated with in-depth qualitative investigation. This research initially sought to elicit information from a small group of students within The British University in Dubai studying for both technical and scientific post-graduate degree courses, but it was later decided to broaden the sample of UAE higher education providers.

The research tackles the essential question of whether Emirati women receive the same support as their male counterparts, when it comes to seeking education and evaluates whether their peer and societal influences are a positive guide towards them achieving their technical and scientific study aspirations.

The research anticipates that women in the UAE have in the past and probably even today experienced barriers both self and societal which can negatively impact on their educational achievement and in the long run applying the knowledge gained from what they study towards becoming more successful individuals in the workplace.

The relevance of this research therefore actually lies in the attempt to understand the issues through individual psychological perspectives than from a macro-empirical perspective. The focus is on understanding the opportunities and problems from an “inside-outside” approach rather than an outward casual macro-level study. This dissertation also seeks to understand how some women, despite experiencing these barriers, have been extremely successful in their careers and personal lives.

1.5. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of the research is the fact that the majority of the literature conducted on the subject is mostly influenced by the thought and influences of Western societies, which are very different from that in the UAE, despite the country being one of the most tolerant and cosmopolitan governments in the Arab world. The interview questions that form the backbone of this narrative research were developed using theoretical insights provided by the research literature. However ample scope has been provided to keep the questions as open ended as possible to offer research participants the required flexibility and freedom to elaborate and respond in a way that suits their own perspectives, values and life histories. The analysis and interpretation is conducted in a manner consistent with mainstream narrative research studies.

It is anticipated that due to the scope that this method of research provides that respondents will be quite open, informative and detailed in their comments.

Despite the evident limitations of geographically biased literature, by and large the problems faced by women in societies that are evolving or that are developed with regards to education, recognition and career fulfilment are similar. Thereby it is believed that it is important to review and analyse literature that has been written on gender studies, women's careers and educational aspirations because it provides a robust starting point grounded in theory for a study of Emirati women's educational preferences in the UAE.

While admittedly the size of the sample studied in this research is small and specific to a particular group of academic institutions, it is hoped that this research is a representation of themes evident across the region and will provide greater impetus towards understanding and addressing the issue of education and women's emancipation in the Arab World.

1.6. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This dissertation introduces and reviews the literature, further to which it explains the research methodology and moves on to the analysis of the findings from narrative interviews carried out with 10 Emirati female postgraduate students. It concentrates on their accounts of the factors influencing their choice of educational degree and future aspirations, lastly culminating in recommendations on how more effective study and career choices can be made. It also discusses how the government and families associated with them may successfully influence the decision making patterns of the young women of this country from both societal and individualistic aspects.

Chapter One provides an overview and introduction to the dissertation. Chapter Two provides some of the background on the UAE, its unique history and culture with the key emphasis on the status of women in UAE society. It then discusses past and current government policies on women and education in the UAE. There is also a discussion of the role of religion and culture and on how these each influence the educational and career decision making of Emirati females.

Chapter Three contains the theoretical literature review. This chapter presents an overview of key literature pertaining to three broad streams of thought that

form the primary themes contributing to the subject of this dissertation, namely women's education, sex-role stereotyping, women's aspirations and formative influences. It also briefly discusses the differences between attitudes, aptitudes, course choice and participation in the workforce both in terms of qualification attainment and assimilation.

Chapter Four presents the methodology used in this research, including full length transcribed and interpreted narrative interviews undertaken with the sample group, the pilot study which was conducted prior to the final study, and an explanation of the style of the interviews, why narrative research was chosen rather than adopting a quantitative approach as well as the basis on which the participants were selected, what key research questions were taken into consideration and finally the design and relationship between the interview questions.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the face-to-face interviews. These are presented, in a format where excerpts from the transcript of the interview text are presented and then analyzed and interpreted in light of the key research questions for the dissertation.

It analyzes and interprets each and every question in detail, enumerating upon the reason those questions were chosen, the manner in which they were posed, the patterns observed among the responses obtained across different postgraduate disciplines and how these responses could have been influenced by different participant attributes such as age and course choice.

Chapter Six delves into discussion with regard to comparing the findings with the theories and lines of thought established by the literature review. It also attempts to sketch a true picture of ground realities and influencing factors for today's Emirati woman with regard to education.

Chapter Seven then proceeds towards providing critical recommendations based on the literature surveyed as well as the participant interviews undertaken. The study then concludes with a brief description of avenues for further research and the alternative areas of interest that the study uncovered.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The UAE is a federation of seven emirates that was founded on 2nd December 1971 by H.H Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan with the cooperation of the ruler's of the area then known to the world as the Trucial States. As part of a single unified federation comprising seven Emirates, the country jointly known as UAE came into existence upon independence being granted by the UK.

The seven emirates are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah. Initially a rather backward area with limited activities to fuel the economy namely local trade, fishing and pearling, the discovery of oil in the late 1960's brought forth much prosperity and progress to the citizens of the country apart from proving to be a land of opportunity for much of the country's sizeable expatriate population who also play an important part of the country's socio- economic fabric.

Traditionally it was not until the late 1960's that the initial forays of providing modern education were made in the country. Even then education in those times remained as a restricted privilege for those who could afford it and even among those who could, a luxury if their families would let them surpass the limitations imposed by social norms and religious restrictions.

This was mainly due to the fact that women in those days were mainly expected to be the supportive caregiver of the household, expected mainly to cook and rear children and perform all those duties that women have been doing for ages across many traditional societies.

Owing to that, much of the talent and aspirations that the Emirati women had regarding their education and progress was left in the dark until in the late 1960's there were a series of affirmative action moves by Late HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan to promote women's education in the UAE and also send them abroad for studies with various government backed scholarships.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. OVERVIEW

The UAE and the Gulf region in particular still remain a comparatively unknown continent when it comes to comparison with other regions of the world and their populations that have been taken up for study by research scholars worldwide.

For this reason this literature review will draw the bulk of its material for analysis from three broad areas namely abstract literature on the UAE and the Arab world on women, gender, leadership, careers and aspirations, specific work on women's education and preferences from literature produced worldwide and finally from various secondary sources such as regional publications and newspaper articles that have commented and critiqued on the subject.

3.2. THE BEGINNING

Since the foundation of UAE, Sheikh Zayed had been one of the most fervent advocates for the education and participation of women in the development of the country.

Despite the socio-economical constraints that cropped up in an Islamic society, governed by rules of Sharia and having very orthodox views on the role to be played by women in modern society prevalent in UAE society at the time, Sheikh Zayed in contrast was very liberal towards women's rights compared to his contemporaries in the Gulf Countries:

Women have the right to work everywhere. Islam affords to women their rightful status, and encourages them to work in all sectors, as long as they are afforded the appropriate respect. The basic role of women is the upbringing of children, but, over and above that, we must offer opportunities to a woman who chooses to perform other functions. What women have achieved in the Emirates in only a short space of time makes me both happy and content. We sowed our seeds yesterday, and today the fruit has already begun to appear. We praise God for the role that women play in our society. It is clear that this

role is beneficial for both present and future generations. (UAE Interact, 2008, p. 20).

3.3. GOVERNMENT POLICY AND UAE WOMEN

The current government policy towards women's education in the UAE has been in a stage of constant evolution since when the first modern schools were established in the early 1960's followed by UAE's first state university in Al Ain in the 1980's that is now widely recognized as a regional centre for educational excellence.

3.4. WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Education has always been accorded great importance under Islam, and the pursuit of knowledge and excelling at the same is considered a solemn duty for both men and women of Islamic society (Al Faruqi, 1988; Harik and Marston, 2003; Ahmad, 1978).

This backed by the progressive nature of the political leadership of the UAE ensured that ever since independence, the government of the UAE has been actively encouraging and supporting Emirati women to pursue post-school education in a number of fields.

Right from the early sixties where the UAE women had their role models to look up to in fields like the police force in the form of the Al Shamsi sisters, Fatima and Mariam Al Shamsi, the UAE has had no shortage of role models in terms of women excelling in education and rising up to the highest levels despite the social, cultural and religious constraints. By 2007, it was reported that more than 70 per cent of all university graduates in the UAE were women (*Women in the United Arab Emirates: A Portrait of Progress*, n.d., p. 2).

It is still widely noted that that there is still a tendency for women to be concentrated in some sectors and occupations, as has been found by other research, suggesting that women are concentrated in areas such as

administrative jobs, school teaching, the public sector, and the health care sector (Adam, 2003; Baud and Mahgoub, 2001a, p. 155; ECSSR, 2002b, p. 1).

It should however be noted that this is widely changing. There is now across the board a changing trend in terms of educational preferences among female Emirati graduates as seen in the case of Fatima Bafaraj, the first Emirati female engineer to graduate in Aviation in the UAE, Salma Al Baloushi, UAE's first woman co-pilot for a major airline, Dr Rawda Mutawa Al Abdullah and Kholoud Al Dhaheri the country's first female judge.

What is interesting to note here is that the choice of careers of these women are not what one would typically call women's careers, in strict parlance of gender stereotyping. Careers in industries like aviation, police and law enforcement were previously most exclusively constrained to a male dominated domain.

3.5. FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL CHOICES - THEORIES

Since the late 1960s there have been a series of systematic efforts to understand the psychological dynamics and societal factors that contribute to the cause of women's education, their career choices and aspirations from a variety of standpoints in terms of analysis ranging from cognitive psychology to gender stereotyping and socio-cultural frameworks.

However the fact remains that despite over four decades of work and research being carried out to understand the reasons behind women's career aspirations and how they actually develop in the workforces and economies of countries they belong, the results are still largely skewed towards a more male-based pattern approach filled with assumptions and generalizations more tinted from a male researchers perspective of gender choices and career aspirations (Parsons & Goff, 1980).

One problem with gender based research is that it sometimes has tried to streamline assumptions leading to a potentially misleading point of view by questioning "Why aren't women more like men?" without trying to fully delve

into the workings of male and female minds in the light of the various socio-psychological and cultural influences that shape young women's career choices today.

3.5.1. GENDER AND CULTURE ROLE STEREOTYPING – HOW BIG AN INFLUENCE?

No analysis of any decision making issue is complete without considering the cultural and social variables present within the country's culture and how this would affect the target population in particular. The UAE in this regard is no exception.

It has widely been a matter of prevalent social norm and custom that most Arab women, including those in the UAE have as part of an orthodox Islamic society been perceived largely as individuals to stay at home taking care of the home, as mothers and caregivers in general (Gallant, 2006; UNDP, 2003, p. 7). To some extent owing to normatively influenced cultural pressures as well as government policies to ensure the perpetuation of the Emirati population, most Emirati women are expected and in cases even encouraged to marry early and have large families whether they wish to continue their education after marriage or not (Gallant, 2006; Dirie, 1998; Harik and Marston, 2003; Sha'aban, 1996; Soffan, 1980)

The Islamic code of conduct prescribed and religiously followed, is in a form a very subtle but decisive type of cultural stereotyping.

What about gender stereotyping in the UAE today? Although as has been mentioned, the bulk of academic aspirants of undergraduate and postgraduate female students veer towards the more soft vocations such as teaching, nursing and the social sciences, the country today boasts many more female graduates in fields such as law, aviation and even the police force that were virtually unknown over three decades ago. Students of today's day and age in UAE guided by the country's able leadership and highly advanced educational institutions are increasingly moving towards dominance in occupations usually considered non-traditional as the UAE society at large witnesses a paradigm shift into what it deems as acceptable vs. taboo for an Emirati woman in terms of career choice and ultimate aspiration. (Al Marzouki, 2004, p. 1; ECSSR, 2002a, p. 1)

Analyzing the issue of gender stereotyping more in depth, there has been a great deal of focus on trying to comprehend the dynamics behind traditional vs. non-traditional career choice among women and how this affects their choice of educational courses

(Nageley, 1971; Kriger, 1972; Tangri, 1972; Wolkon, 1972; Klemmack and Edwards, 1973; Almquist, 1974).

Also in light of Super's (1957) theory which postulates that an individual's educational and occupational choice is a result of the sum total of the variables of self perception, sex-role and peer influences within society, UAE society is no exception to being a mixture of traditional and modern values.

Upon a close analysis of Super's theory, as presented in the figure below, every individual is assumed to proceed through a variety of phases from birth to maturity both in terms of cognitive and emotional development. These phases and the individual's exposure to them at various points in his/her life cycle play a determining part in their choice of vocation and courses of study. In brief the 4 stages can be explained as follows:

Growth (Birth to mid teens) - Major developmental tasks are to develop a self-concept and to move from play to work orientation.

Sub stages

- **Fantasy (4-10 years old)** - needs dominate career fantasies and little reality orientation.
- **Interest (11-12 years old)** - identifies likes/dislikes as basis for career choices
- **Capacity (13-14 years old)** - more reality incorporated; can relate own skills to specific requirements of jobs.

Exploration (Mid teens through early 20's) - major tasks are to develop a realistic self-concept and implement a vocational preference through role experiments and exploration; there is a gradual narrowing of choices leading to implementation of a preference. Preferences become choices when acted upon.

Sub Stages

- **Tentative (15-17 years old)** - tentative choices incorporating needs, interests, abilities are tried out in fantasy, coursework, part time work, volunteer, shadowing.
- **Crystallization of Preference (18-21 years old)** - General preference is converted into specific choice. Reality dominates as one enters the job market or training after high school. Choosing a college major or field of training.
- **Specifying a Vocational Preference (early 20's)** - trial/little commitment; the first job is tried out as life's work but the implemented choice is provisional and the person may cycle back through crystallizing and re-specifying if choices are felt not to be appropriate.

Establishment (mid 20's through mid 40's) - major tasks are to find secure niche in one's field and advance within it.

Sub Stages

- **Trial and Stabilization (25-30 years old)** - process of settling down, if unsatisfactory may make 1-2 more changes before the right job is found.
- **Advancement (30-40 years old)** - efforts directed at securing one's position, acquiring seniority, developing skills, demonstrating superior performance, resume building actions.

Maintenance (40's through early 60's) - Major task is to preserve one's gains and develop non-occupational roles for things one always wanted to do; Little new ground is broken, one continues established work patterns. One faces competition from younger workers.

Disengagement or Decline (Late 60's through retirement) - Tasks are deceleration of the career, gradual disengagement from world of work and retirement. One is challenged to find other sources of satisfaction.

For the purposes of our study the main phases which are of interest in terms of close analysis for this sample of women engaged in postgraduate study are the growth, exploration and a part of the establishment stage.

3.5.2. PERCEPTIONS OF SELF, ACHIEVEMENT AND SEX-ROLES AS AN INFLUENCE

Having arrived at the fact that the main period of life which impacts an individual's cognitive development towards her aspirations in terms of education are the growth and establishment stage, it is worth noting that in these periods, among the key influencing factors are a person's perceptions of self, drivers of achievement which may be culturally as well as parentally induced and the images formed in the mind as a result of peer influences.

A student's perception of herself, her worth and esteem in both her own mind and in the minds of her parents, social circle and peers play a huge role in determining the choice of educational courses and the aspirations that come along with it. Depending upon whether the level of esteem is high or low, the student feels more effective in the course of her choice and this eventually leads to positive reinforcement.

It is beyond doubt then that self-efficacy (Bandura 1997, 2002, 2006, 2008) bolstered by a high level of self-esteem and belief in one's capability are a key influence in the determining of educational choices. Further research in this area also suggests that it is

among the key internal psychological variables that affect vocational and career choices of both young men and women (Hackett and Betz 1981).

According to Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) women tend to feel less effective in those courses and vocations that are traditionally considered more of a male dominated stronghold. This may be due to a variety of cultural, sub-cultural as well as familial factors. Furthermore it is worth considering that even though the landscape and ideologies of UAE are undergoing a rapid change in favour of a progressive educational outlook, many of the country's young national women students are still bound by the restrictions and decorum of an orthodox Islamic state. This may well be one of the reasons why from a very young age itself in the Arab World, people are psychologically attuned by social norms to only consider traditionally gender dominated occupations and as a result young women students today are more likely to choose only those occupations and majors that require minimal interaction with men. (Al Darmaki and Sayed 2004, 2009)

3.5.3. INFLUENCE OF CAREER COUNSELLING AND PEER PRESSURE ON COURSE CHOICE

A close study of most modern literature sources would easily reveal that there is a great degree of correlation between a positive influence on the career and course choice and the seeking of career counselling by college students (Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson & Odes, 2009; Ludwikowski, Vogel, & Armstrong, 2009; Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999; Whiston & Rahardja, 2008).

Studies conducted on the course and career decision making choice influences of young Arab students also supports the idea that career counselling is a pivotal influence in the course of their academic lives. It enables them to make more informed decisions with regards to their choice of course and ultimate vocation which they wish to adopt as a means of livelihood (Soliman 1986).

An important indicator of young Arab students' difficulty in making career choices and selecting college majors are elaborated quite extensively in studies by Al Samadi and Al Tahan (1997) and Shawky (2003). In these studies they found that young Arab students, like most students elsewhere in the world, faced a dilemma in arriving at their vocational interests and were often confused when the prospect of choosing a course for higher studies dawned upon them. In addition most students also reported a feeling of

anxiety when career-planning and sought help for career related issues, which following a series of sessions often was satisfactorily resolved.

Another intervention apart from career counselling which definitely influences young college students' course decisions is the presence of peer-pressure or the "need to follow the herd". As per Super's (1957) developmental stages approach theory adolescence is one of the most important stages of an individual's cognitive development particularly where career choices and decision making are concerned.

It is also a period of identity formation, association and disassociation with certain types of personalities and behaviours that would lead to the person being typecast as masculine or feminine. Many times student course choices at this juncture are not driven by levels of actual academic interest or inherent capability but to a great part by the recommendations reinforced by the actions of peer groups around the student and the desire to present oneself as an attractive (to the group) masculine or feminine person (Hannover and Kessels 2004).

Adding to this what is a matter of concern is the fact that most peer pressure induced decisions are often conformist and those which reinforce gender stereotypical behaviour consequently affect student course choices as well (Kessels 2005).

The truth remains that the fields of academic study are still very gender segregation oriented in their approach with men dominating "hard and masculine" fields like engineering, construction and science and women dominating in fields of arts, humanities and healthcare; occupations that are considered more "soft" and conformist to the gender role of a woman.

It is these gendered and separatist mentalities of segregation that run widely across the minds of both parents and institutions coupled with the peers that influence young people's educational and career decisions. As an additional decision variable that often determines postgraduate course choice, a common reason for young women turning down or not entering into more "hard" male oriented fields is because of the principal feeling of being unwelcome there (Martin, 1996; Lyons et al, 2003; Bedard & Cho, 2007).

Super's Conception of Life Stages and Development Tasks

Growth <i>Beginning at Birth</i>	Exploration <i>Around age 14</i>	Establishment <i>Around age 25</i>	Maintenance <i>Around age 44</i>	Decline <i>Around age 60 & up</i>
<p>Characteristics</p> <p>Development of self-concepts through identifying with key figures in family. Begin to learn behaviors associated with self-help, social interaction, self-direction, goal setting, and persistence.</p> <p>Sub stages</p> <p><i>Fantasy (4-10 yrs)</i> Needs are a priority, fantasy role play is important</p> <p><i>Interests (11-12 yrs)</i> Likes are key in aspirations and activities</p> <p><i>Capacity (13-14 yrs)</i> Abilities become clear and important with job requirements being considered.</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>Self-examination, role try-outs, and exploring of occupations begin to take place in school, during leisure activities, and part-time work.</p> <p>Sub stages</p> <p><i>Tentative (15-17 yrs)</i> Needs, interests, capacities, values, and opportunities are all considered. Tentative choices are made and tried out. Possible work roles are identified.</p> <p><i>Crystallizing a Vocational Preference</i></p> <p><i>Transitions (18-21 yrs)</i> Realistic considerations become valuable while entering professional training or work force and individual attempts to implement self-concept.</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>The individual has found their permanent and appropriate field of work. These years are considered to be the most productive and creative years of the life span.</p> <p>Sub stages</p> <p><i>Trial (with commitment - age 25-30)</i> The individual settles down. During this stage the individual begins to support themselves and their family. They begin to develop a lifestyle, make use of their abilities and past training. They may also begin to become involved in meaningful interests.</p> <p><i>Advancement (age 31-43)</i> Individuals begin to become more focused on their place in their occupation. They become</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>The individual has already made a place in the world of work, NOW the concern is how to hold on to it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little new ground is broken; the individual basically maintains their established work patterns <p>Concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned about maintaining present status • Concerned about competition from younger workers in the advancement stage. 	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>During this stage there is a physical and/or mental powers decline. Work activity begins to change or cease. The individual gradually involves themselves in other life roles.</p> <p>Sub stages</p> <p><i>Disengagement (age 60-64)</i> The individual may begin to ask for their work to be delegated to other individuals. They may also become more selective in what they do or how they participate in activities. With the anticipation of retirement some begin to plan carefully, and others gradually or suddenly become aware of the fact of impending retirement and plan less carefully.</p> <p><i>Retirement (age 65 & up)</i> Individuals begin to give up their jobs or careers. They begin to immerse themselves in other roles, home life, hobbies, civic</p>

	<p><i>Specifying a Vocational Preference</i></p> <p><i>Trial-Little Commitment (22-24 yrs)</i> A seemingly appropriate occupation has been found, a first job is tried as potential life work. Commitment is provisional and if not appropriate, the individual may begin process over of crystallizing, specifying and implementing a new preference.</p>	<p>interested in their security and advancement. They also have the expectation that they will become financially stable and move towards challenging levels of responsibility and independence. This stage may become very frustrating if advancement is not forth coming.</p>		<p>activities, and on occasion studies. The cessation of the worker role comes to some very easily and pleasantly and to others with difficulty and disappointment, and to some with death.</p>
<p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing what kind of person they want to be • Realization of the world of work • Understanding the meaning of work 	<p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing a job preference • Developing a realistic self-concept • Learning more about opportunities 	<p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming stable in a chosen occupation • Consolidating chosen occupation • Advancement 	<p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting new limitations • Identifying new problems to work on • Developing new skills • Focusing on essential activities • Presentation of achieved status and gains 	<p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective reduction in pace and/or load of work • Planning for retirement • Retirement living

(Table 1 - Super's Conception of Life Stages and Development Tasks)

3.5.4. PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND ITS INFLUENCE

In most studies that research the relationship between parental perceptions and its influence on the child's educational course choices, the result has been very clear. Namely that parents do have a very important influence on the minds of their children in their formative years and do function as a pivotal force in influencing their children's choices (Kracke 1997). Parents affect their children's educational choices and their occupational readiness in a multitude of ways. As evidenced in the research works of Schulenberg, Vondracek, and Crouter (1984) and Schnabel, Alfeld, Eccles, Köller and Baumert (2002) one of the primary ways they do this is through gender based stereotyping and educational segregation.

A second determinant is the relationship and the degree of openness in interaction that is shared among the parent and his/her child along with the extent of interaction the child has with the other members of the family as part of a single cohesive unit (Schulenberg et al., 1984). There are a plethora of studies which strongly point to the correlation between child oriented parenting which emphasizes the values of reciprocal relations, security, attachment, warmth and encouragement and its association with a positive impact on the educational exploration capacity development of a child (Schulenberg et al., 1984).

Noack et al (2010) argues that child-oriented parenting results in children who are more likely to be self-directed than their peers, and will exhibit positive behavioural traits such as an leading an active search for information and would be more likely to attempt to arrive at a realistic representation of the self including characteristics relevant to future occupational choices.

As far as the gender based impact of parental influences are concerned, there are some interesting observations which shed light on how the parental influence mechanism works. Paa and McWhirter (2000) report that there is stronger parental support obtained by girls than by boys.

While the above observation is not made with a view towards generalizing the influence of parents across genders, one reason for the findings of gender differences in the extent of occupational exploration could be due to the fact that at younger ages, girls show more exploratory tendencies than boys (Wallace-Broschious, Serafica & Osipow, 1994) and it is only probably later with variables of orthodoxy and segregation brought about by societal norms and familial pressures that the support becomes more channelled

through the decorum dictated by society. It should be noted, however that not all research available points to this distinction and that the findings are mixed in this respect (e.g., Kalakoski & Nurmi, 1998).

3.5.5. EFFECTS THAT THE SCHOOL & TEACHERS HAVE ON EDUCATIONAL CHOICES

The education system in the UAE is a mixture of both government and private schools with all of them encouraging a high degree of freedom and exploration at all levels. Many schools actively encourage interaction and discussion with frequent exposure provided to educational fairs and career counselling sessions that aim to mould future undergraduate students into becoming well informed decision makers.

According to the majority of literature available that studies the significant role that a school plays in influencing the thought processes of a student, Deci & Ryan's (1991) study is of particular interest. In their study they argue that besides formal instruction that most schools provide, many schools must provide students with more general experiences conducive to exploration.

They feel that the school setup is no different from the family often mirroring it in a different infrastructural set-up wherein, just like the family, aspects of in-class interactions such as feelings of security, encouragement to air one's views and to express them play an important part of the exploratory experience cycle.

Although empirical studies related to career choices and formative influences with women in context are limited, research in the educational domain has shown that school and teacher influences toward fostering a positive classroom-climate by being just and encouraging participation had a strong correlation with the motivational effect that a school had towards empowering a student (Vedder, Boekaerts, & Seegers, 2005).

Variables of school engagement (Wentzel, 1997) and domain-specific self-efficacy thoughts (Crombie, 1999) which were brought about by the exposure to various experiences both intrinsic and extrinsic the student went through at school are also key factors.

After parental and peer influence, teacher support is listed as among the most beneficial for students' educational and occupational aspiration development (e.g., Marjoribanks, 1990), career decision-making self-efficacy as well as outcome expectations (Metheny,

McWhirther & O'Neil, 2008), career commitment and perception of barriers (McWhirther, Hackett & Bandalos, 1998).

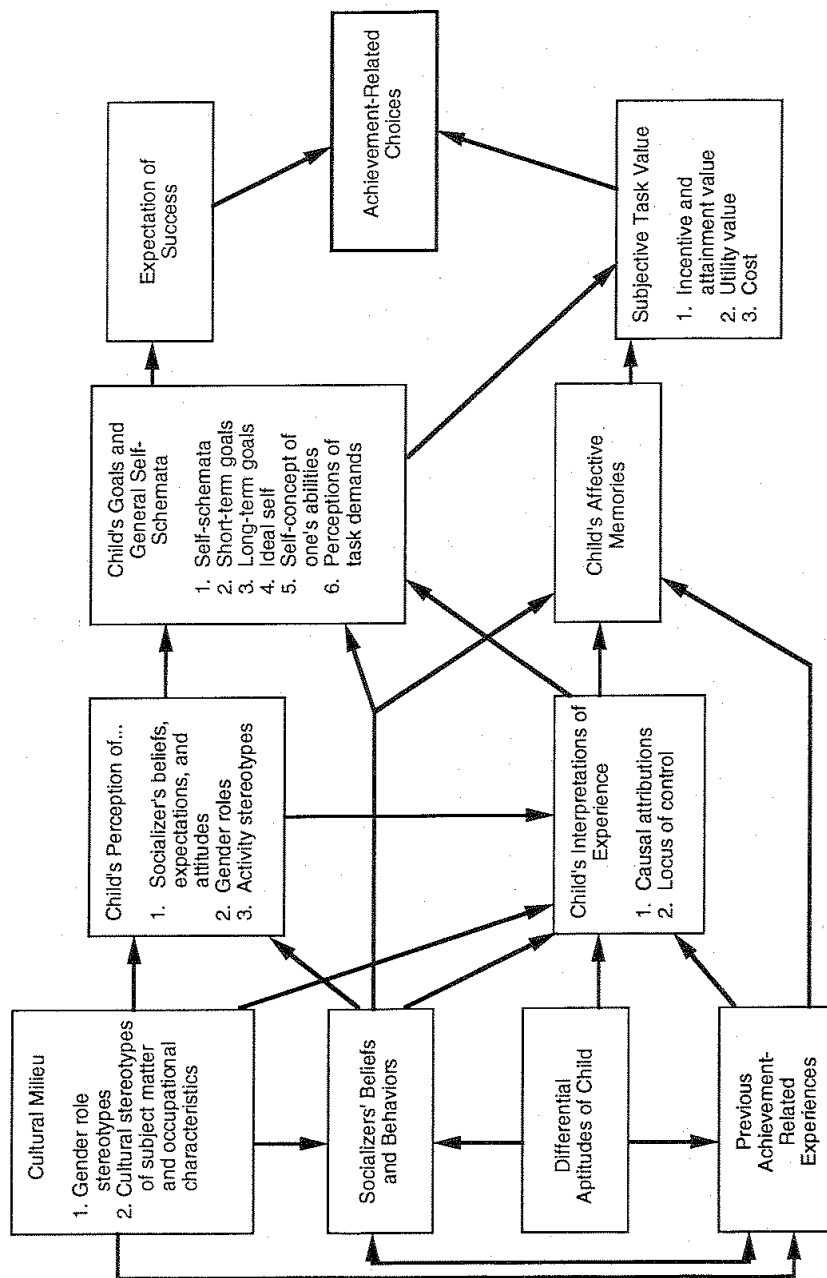


FIGURE 1. Theoretical model of achievement-related choices developed by Eccles (Parsons), Adler, Furtman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, and Midgley, 1983.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The theoretical framework for the research was grounded in the literature reviewed and analysed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this Dissertation.

Given the cognitive, emotional and value-bound aspirational nature of the problem involved and considering the nature of the population to be analyzed it was decided to utilize a purely qualitative research based investigation to enable deep and rich descriptive information to be presented and discussed.

This chapter outlines the design and methodology used in the research. It elaborates upon the research aims, objectives and questions as outlined in Chapter 1 and discusses the ethical considerations associated with this research and the steps taken to meet such considerations. It also discusses the pilot study which preceded the main study and then explains the qualitative elements taken into consideration whilst designing the format of the interview questions and mapping responses to them. It is followed by accounts of the face-to-face interviews – including how participants were selected and their characteristics, information that was provided to participants, discussion of the ethnographic approach to research, why a qualitative approach was chosen as against a quantitative approach the interview questions and their relationship to the research objectives and questions, language issues, and question format.

4.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants in both the pilot study and face-to-face interviews were advised that their contributions were entirely confidential and that their contributions would remain anonymous to others. Further, they were assured that their contributions would not be published in any way that could identify them to others. Participants were also advised that they were free, for any reason, and at any stage during the research process, to withdraw from the study.

4.3. PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted prior to the final study, and was administered to improve the research instruments and ensure that they were of the highest possible quality. One student participated in the pilot study. She was a student currently pursuing her Master's Degree in Finance and Banking.

The pilot study participant offered valuable contributions towards revising the format of the proposed face-to-face interview questions, as well as commented upon certain questions which could be asked in a way that could elicit a better narrative response. The pilot study participant made contributions such as suggestions for simplification of language and nature of the open ended face-to-face interview questions in addition to making suggestions for the inclusion of more questions that would be beneficial to the overall research.

4.4. QUALITATIVE VS. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH - RELEVANCE

Before we embark on to the stage of interviewing our sample, let us begin by examining the relevance of the qualitative research methodology used in this dissertation to analyze the problem at hand. Why is such a method used? What is its specific utility over the more absolute and favoured method of quantitative survey research ?

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin 1994). Quantitative researchers on the contrary study only the absolute, what is quantifiable and measurable. In the words of Kerlinger (1994) with respect to quantitative research,

"There's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0"

Given that we are attempting to research the factors governing a highly cognitive and affective process based on thoughts, preferences and feelings which motivate students towards choosing a particular course of study, it was felt that interview research study undertaken with the help of narrative analysis based on face-to-face interviews conducted in a semi-structured format would be most productive in terms of results and findings obtained.

4.5. FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

4.5.1. SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Ten students were interviewed in a mix of face-to-face as well as telephone interviews with the researcher. All ten interview participants were Emirati female undergraduate students studying at different universities in UAE like The British University in Dubai (BuiD), Khalifa University for Science and Technology, American University of Sharjah, Masdar Institute of Science and Technology and Abu Dhabi University, as the scope of this research only aims to study the specific influences on that particular group of students within a select demographic background. While it is recognised that it may have been valuable to identify views and possible solutions from students from the broader Arab community, practical considerations and restrictions of time meant that the sample was restricted to the target group. However, this limitation is not considered to be especially problematic because, as has been noted above, the responses are detailed owing to the nature of the interview and thus are treated as representative of at least a part of Emirati women's experience of postgraduate education and career.

For the interviews, it was desired to interview a balanced representation of views from across several areas of academic and technical specialization, so the 10 students were selected from the disciplines of Finance and Banking, Project Management, Civil Engineering, Information Technology, SDBE and Engineering Management

4.5.2. INFORMATION PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS

Face-to-face interview participants were provided, via email, with a written brief about the nature, purpose and importance of the research. This was provided to the participants along with the sequence of the interview and an overview of areas from where the questions would be asked so that they could, in advance, notify the interviewer if there were any questions that were sensitive or needed to be edited out of the session.

Additionally, at the commencement of the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and given a short, verbal overview of the nature, purpose and importance of the research to remind them of what was being sought to be achieved, to help them to focus their responses, and to ensure that interview subjects perceived that their responses were likely to help bring about desired changes:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today to discuss your views about what are the key driving forces that led you to choose the particular course that you are enrolled at BuiD. There is no right or wrong answer to any question that I ask today. I am interested in knowing your thoughts about the research questions. Please also feel completely free not to answer any of the questions if you would prefer not to. Although I am tape-recording our interview today, your contribution will remain anonymous to others, and further, your contributions will not be published in any way that could identify you to others. Today's interview will involve my asking you about your thoughts on why you chose the particular course that you are studying in, who or what were your key influences in this choice from childhood till now, what you hope to do once you graduate and how you see your course of choice helping you to do that . I anticipate that the entire interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. We will begin with some preliminary questions and then move on to the substantive interview questions.

4.5.3. ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

An ethnographic approach was adopted in the administration of face-to-face interviews with participants. Ethnographic research involves descriptive and detailed study of a group of people and its behaviour, culture, and characteristics, and is considered to be particularly useful when seeking insights that may not be possible from other research methods.

4.5.4. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There were a total of six open ended questions asked to each of the participants as a starting point and as the basic frame of reference. These questions were uniform throughout the interview for all participants.

However since narrative research is mainly dependent on the stories given by participants as a recollection of their experiences and exposure to the subject of the question at that point of time in their life, there were also other questions that were asked unique to each participant and their stories given as answers to the same uniform sets of questions.

Given below are the six questions and the rationale behind choosing them with an explanation of their relevance to the research objectives as stated at the beginning of this dissertation.

Question 1:

What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in?

This question was intended to elicit a first person response to the need posed in research objective #1, to understand the factors influencing the choices of post graduate educational courses among Emirati women.

Question 2:

What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here?

This question was fielded with two fold objectives, one to compare whether the concept of “career maturity” – i.e exposure to a career and working within the industry brought about any difference in perception of career development aspirations pre and post qualification.

Secondly to lend more clarity to the theme of research objective #3 – to explore the expectations of students both pre-and post-education in addition to studying whether these are being met post-education.

Question 3:

What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult and why?

This question was asked with two objectives in mind. One to understand whether the modules offered met the student's perception based and interest based needs in terms of course offering. Secondly it was designed, to explore whether it was any specific area or subject within the particular course that motivated the student to opt for it.

Question 4:

Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining (Name of University)?

This question was posed with an intent to fulfill the purpose of research objective #2, which was to comprehend the driving influences from socio-economic and societal perspectives by trying to understand what formative as well as peer forces might have moulded the student's ideas, views and values when they were growing up in addition to trying to ascertain whether the previous educational background of the student had any major influence on her course choice and eventual enrolment.

Question 5:

What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

This question was included to fulfill the aims of research objective #4 – to identify the barriers that make it difficult for Emirati women to be

represented at work either due to institutional or self-imposed and societal constraints.

Question 6:

Is there anything else you feel our interview should have covered or that you want to ask me?

In the course of designing the interview questions, it was realized that even though the researcher might attempt to come to a pointed conclusion by asking and eliciting responses, there may be additional areas of discussion that might emerge as a result of the questions posed either during the course of the interview, as additional tracks from the base questions or even leading to exploration of new uncovered areas. This question was included to deal with aspects of that nature.

4.5.5. LANGUAGE

The language in which interviews were conducted was in English only. In certain instances where the words used in a particular question were complex, it was explained to certain participants in a simpler way so as to facilitate better understanding.

4.5.6. QUESTION FORMAT

Open-ended questions were used to enable identification of creative and unexpected solutions to problems being experienced, as well as to enable interviewees to comment naturally on issues of UAE culture they felt might be important to the research (Converse and Presser, 1986, pp. 34-35).

4.6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

A primarily qualitative method of narrative research was used to answer the research questions. The main reason for using a narrative research method was to facilitate the answers to the questions to be as close to life experience and rich

in terms of stories from the interviewees own lives as possible. The questions were designed to elicit participants' views to provide information for answering all four research objectives, and to answer all three research questions.

In some places there was a slight deviation from the standard set of questions owing to the different slants by way of the stories that the interviewees shared and in certain cases, such supplementary questions were required to follow of the lines of thought while engaged in interview discussion. This list was compiled after a review of similar studies analyzing Emirati women students' educational preferences in comparison to the Western world and by means of numerous discussions with the dissertation supervisor and suggestions invited from the interviewees themselves.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

There were a total of 10 interviews undertaken. The breakdown of the interviewees and their backgrounds were as follows:

- Students from 5 different universities participated.
- 6 different courses were represented.
- In terms of levels of study, 7 were Master's level and 3 were PhD level scholars.
- By working sector, 5 were employed in the government sector and 5 were full-time scholars
- By marital status, 8 students were single and 2 were married
- By number of years work experience prior to joining the course, 2 students had worked for more than five years, 6 had experience of between 2-5 years, 1 under two years experience and 1 had no prior experience other than being a full time student.

5.2. DATA ANALYSIS

5.2.1. INTERVIEWEE PROFILE

ALL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS WERE FEMALE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

- The first interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, working in middle management in the government sector, and with between 2 and 7 years in the current organisation and the current job;
- The second interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, married and a mother of 5 children, with no work experience and is a full-time student;
- The third interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, working in a management position in the government sector, and with between 2 and 7 years in the current organisation and the current job;
- The fourth interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, with approximately 2 years working experience and currently a full-time student;

- The fifth interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, working in a non-management position in the government sector, with between 2 and 7 years in the current organisation and current position/job;
- The sixth interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, working in a non-management position in the government sector, and with 7 years work experience in the current organisation and current position/job;
- The seventh interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, with 3 years work experience. Currently a full time PhD scholar;
- The eighth interviewee was in the 25-34 age group, single, working in a non-management position in the semi-government sector, and with 4 years in the current organisation and current position/job;
- The ninth interviewee was a female in the 25-34 age group, married, with no prior work experience other than that of a full time student;
- The tenth interviewee was a female in the 25-34 age group, single, working in a non-management position in the semi-government sector, and with less than 8 years of work experience prior to taking up full-time study as a PhD scholar.

Despite the fact that all the participants in the research were female post graduate students, there was great diversity in the variables of the students' experience levels, the industries worked for and in certain cases their cultural and family backgrounds providing balance to the views sampled. In addition to the diversity and demographic characteristics, the fact that narrative analysis and empirical inquiry techniques were employed, brought out different life stories which were unique in themselves.

5.2.2. SEGMENTATION OF NARRATIVES

The analyses of each of the student's narratives were completed using a methodical approach informed by the categorical content perspective. A four-step system was used for performing this analysis. The steps involved namely were:

1. Selection of the subtext

2. Definition of the content categories
3. Sorting the material into categories
4. Drawing conclusions from the results

The Table 2 below shows the category of groups and the responses of each of the participants against them

CATEGORY	REASON GIVEN
Formative influences in degree choice	
Interviewee #1 - Amna Al Akraf	Needed to get a higher certification in the area of work, experience taught her the importance of higher qualifications.
Interviewee #2 – Fatmah Mohammed	Wanted to move into management side of academia rather than staying as a school mathematics teacher. Her passion was not in teaching. Also encouraged by government policy on study leave granted for higher studies.
Interviewee #3 – Ghada Al Shaiba	Family influences through her uncle who was an IT Engineer and the strong desire to be a pioneer in her chosen field of IT.
Interviewee #4 – Nawal Al Qadi	Mainly due to necessity created by the job and its related exposures, needed to progress in her career.
Interviewee #5 – Athari Al Naqbi	Curiosity about the “green building” concept introduced by Dubai Municipality.
Interviewee #6 - Aamena Al Shamsi	Interest in the course and teacher’s encouragement and awareness generated by others towards the course and careers.
Interviewee #7 – Shaikha Al Ahbabi	Naturally interested in information security and the need to progress in her

	career.
Interviewee #8 – Haifaa Sharif	Mother was the main influence, followed by advisor at university which was also a source of encouragement.
Interviewee #9 – M.A	Mainly encouragement from parents and family.
Interviewee #10 – Fatma Bazargan	Career necessities and the presence of a government scholarship program.

CATEGORY	REASON GIVEN
Influence of previous work experience on course choice, career maturity	
Interviewee #1 - Amna Al Akraf	Had worked as a Financial Auditor with the Government of Dubai for 3 years until joining the MSc in Finance and Banking course. It seemed to be a logical progression in terms of blending practical knowledge with academic credentials. Definitely a positive force in decision making.
Interviewee #2 – Fatmah Mohammed	Previous work experience in teaching did not motivate her, as she wanted to move into something more management oriented in the government. Finance and banking was a good starting point with lucrative career options, so she joined. Work experience in this case was a negative (push) influencing factor.
Interviewee #3 – Ghada Al Shaiba	Her previous work experience was a key factor influencing course choice, especially

	<p>since it enabled her to progress in her career through a promotion. Also, she wanted an academic grounding in the field of Project Management as she felt, as she got promoted, the skill sets demanded of the job were more work assignment and management oriented, where such a degree would be the perfect accompaniment.</p>
Interviewee #4 – Nawal Al Qadi	<p>Driven to choose project management as a logical extension of her work as a Project Manager at the UAE Environmental Agency.</p>
Interviewee #5 – Athari Al Naqbi	<p>Here her work experience had no influence on the course choice. Interviewee states she will most probably change jobs once she completes her course. She is doing the course out of interest and to gain knowledge.</p>
Interviewee #6 - Aamena Al Shamsi	<p>Previous work experience in her case did not play any role in influencing course choice.</p>
Interviewee #7 – Shaikha Al Ahbabi	<p>Previous work experience in her case did not play any role in influencing course choice. Rather it was more of a personal career ambition of wanting to be an Engineer that led her to enrol for the course.</p>
Interviewee #8 – Haifaa Sharif	<p>There is a clear link between work experience and course choice in this case. The interviewee has been working in operations at the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority for more than 3 years,</p>

	this shaped her thought processes in wanting to undertake a Master's in Civil Engineering as a course building on her Bachelor's degree, also in the same discipline.
Interviewee #9 – M.A	The interviewee has no work experience other than that of being a full time student.
Interviewee #10 – Fatma Bazargan	The interviewee's main scope of work has been in the area of information security. This factor along with her desire to earn additional qualifications in the field driven by her years of experience and exposure in the field are a distinct influence.

(Table 3 - Influence of previous work experience on course choice, career maturity)

CATEGORY	REASON GIVEN
Presence of modules of interest and deterring factors in terms of the course as an influence	
Interviewee #1 - Amna Al Akraf	Modules of interest and direct relevance to field of work were cited as a definite positive influence.
Interviewee #2 – Fatmah Mohammed	The course in itself represented an opportunity for the interviewee to move across fields, however, she feels that she should have opted for a lighter course (non-research based) given her work-life balance and family commitments.
Interviewee #3 – Ghada Al Shaiba	The modules of people and culture, program and portfolio management had

	specific appeal to the interviewee and it is the blend of the soft qualitative areas with the hard science areas that attracted her to the course.
Interviewee #4 – Nawal Al Qadi	Course modules were stated to have no impact on course choice.
Interviewee #5 – Athari Al Naqbi	Course modules were stated to have no impact on course choice.
Interviewee #6 - Aamena Al Shamsi	Learning from data was a favourite element of the course for the interviewee, which led to her eventually taking up a higher degree in doctoral research in the form of a PhD.
Interviewee #7 – Shaikha Al Ahbabi	Course modules were stated to have no impact on course choice.
Interviewee #8 – Haifaa Sharif	Elements of environmental science and being able to study its impact on human beings and the management related qualitative courses such as people and culture cited to be the key factors additionally reinforcing course choice.
Interviewee #9 – M.A	Course modules were stated to have no impact on course choice.
Interviewee #10 – Fatma Bazargan	Practical research orientation was a key influencing factor among the modules which led to course selection.

(Table 4 - Presence of modules of interest and deterring factors in terms of the course as an influence)

CATEGORY	REASON GIVEN
Influence of barriers, both systemic and cultural	
Interviewee #1 - Amna Al Akraf	No barriers exist today, it's a myth. The government is doing all it can to support.
Interviewee #2 – Fatmah Mohammed	The barriers exist still in the rural areas where norms of covering the face, less mixing and strict rules make the university attending experience harrowing for the student, but other than this nothing else.
Interviewee #3 – Ghada Al Shaiba	Lack of initiative, work life balance problems and people's perceptions main barriers, but these are small. The UAE government is doing a great job to encourage more participation.
Interviewee #4 – Nawal Al Qadi	The cultural prohibition does exist, but its not due to religious conservatism but more about the issues of status and prestige.
Interviewee #5 – Athari Al Naqbi	No barriers exist anymore and in certain cases, the government is even nurturing entrepreneurship amongst women.
Interviewee #6 - Aamena Al Shamsi	No barriers exist anymore, on the contrary families are now encouraging girls to attend education institutions and study.
Interviewee #7 – Shaikha Al Ahbabi	No barriers exist anymore except one's own initiative. In terms of positive drivers, there is no dearth of opportunity.
Interviewee #8 – Haifaa Sharif	Even though opportunities for study exist, in the professional field it's still a man's

	world. Women have to fight twice as hard to prove themselves.
Interviewee #9 – M.A	Barriers exist in an invisible normative form, it's not culturally preferred for women especially after marriage to do a Master's, but it is looked upon highly later, if one is successful.
Interviewee #10 – Fatma Bazargan	The environment now is far more conducive than it was in the past with scholarships and jobs, though prejudices in the form of the "glass ceiling" exist. Largely though, it boils down to initiative on whether a student wants to study for a course or not.

(Table 5 - Influence of barriers, both systemic and cultural)

5.3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.3.1. **FORMATIVE INFLUENCES AND THEIR ROLE IN INFLUENCING COURSE CHOICE**

In all of the 10 students interviewed, three main sources of inspiration behind their decision to study and take up a particular course emerged. Broadly classified the three sources are, family and social environment of upbringing, influences by role models in personal or professional life, necessity to get qualified prompted by need to advance in one's career by gaining more knowledge.

It is worthwhile to analyze some of the student narratives when it comes to understanding the impacts the family and environment of their upbringing have on them.

Also my family and my husband encouraged me and they find it also it's a good opportunity to develop myself and my work. I choose finance uh.. to complete my Master's in this field.

"My mother does not accept the idea before.. first of all because she says you have your children and how will you manage (yani).. but now, she is supporting me by carrying my children during the studies." (Fatmah Mohamed, married, mother of 5 children, teacher)

While the above excerpt is one from that of a married interviewee from a rural background in the UAE, if we look at the responses from other interviewees such as the one below

"Also like I come from a family with a lot of emphasis on higher education so I think all of...that contributed to my choices." (Amna Al Akraf, single, finance professional)

Sometimes the presence of a role model within the family has also proven to be a source of inspiration in the case of the following interviewee

"my uncle who was a Technical Engineer as one of my first influences in engineering" (Ghada Al Shaiba, single, transport industry professional)

Apart from the family's influence, the influence of college advisors and professors in guiding and moulding the students career path and subsequent course choice has also been stated as in the following excerpt

"The most influential people most definitely was first my mother, then it was my advisor at university as he saw my interest in the specific field of environmental engineering. So my advisor back in the Bachelor's degree after seeing my performance and projects encouraged me." (Haifaa Ismail, single, engineer)

For some interviewees course choice simply represented an avenue for career advancement, learning and better chances of employment. In the words of another interviewee

"There was most definitely a choice since I wanted to move into management field after having experienced the theory and operational side of IT." (Nawal Al Qadi, project manager, governmental agency)

For several interviewees it was also the desire to be a sort of role model for other women in the field that prompted them to take up their course of study

"Another thing which I must point out that influenced me to do this course is that I would be a pioneer (laughs).. umm as not many women students have done this kind of course" (Ghada Al Shaiba, project manager, government firm)

"I would say both my experience as well as my qualifications with the fact that I am an Emirati woman have made me one of the pioneers in the fields of information and computer security. I think it's because I exploited the right opportunities that came my way" (Fatma Bazargan, research scholar, budding entrepreneur)

There emerges a distinct pattern that is discernible from the narratives above. That the influences that one goes through in one's life in the formative years and the support from the family received towards enrolling and completing a particular course are of great significance in the decision making process for both young and mature students.

Also the role of professors and other senior peers whom the students look up to as a source of guidance, who may not necessarily be their own family.

Finally it also depended upon the student's own intrinsic inclination and awareness about the course as to whether she took up the initial course of choice or not.

5.3.2. INFLUENCES OF CAREER MATURITY, ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTED POTENTIAL OF A COURSE ON COURSE CHOICE

According to Powell and Luzzo (1998), career maturity may be termed as a measure of readiness to make career decisions on the bases of attitude towards and knowledge of career decision making. Going by this measure, it is worthwhile to examine from the narratives collected whether the career maturity level of the interviewee in our study had an influence on the course choice as well.

The main drivers that were found to be in support of course choice were the variables of career maturity, aspirations and expected potential of employment post course as described in some of the narratives below

"I would say it was more events than people that led me to take my course of study because when I completed my undergraduate study, which was in 2002 my Bachelors in Computer Science, I took up a Network Administrator's role and I saw after a year that throughout the career there is a lot of knowledge I needed to have and that's when I wanted to do my Master's" (Fatma Bazargan, research scholar, budding entrepreneur)

Actually the motivation was that I liked research and did not want routine jobs and repetitive work. I like to think out of the box itself. I thought that the Masdar research and its contribution to renewable energy was remarkable. I was curious to contribute more back to the country. (Aamena Al Shamsi, research scholar)

The above two interview excerpts are from senior students having at least 7+ years of work experience, they have completed both Bachelor's and Master's degrees and are currently PhD scholars. In both the narratives above it is clear that the awareness of the discipline of study undertaken, its future career prospects and the student's own interest kindled by knowledge and sound research undertaken in the field has spurred them towards taking their courses of choice.

Let us now compare this in contrast with another student narrative, of a student with no previous work experience, married with one child.

"Well after my Bachelors and my Master's in Project Management, I have become very interested in this field, so I have enrolled for a PhD in Project Management. In terms of what I would like to do, I would definitely want to start working. My first preference is for research than an industry job." (M.A., homemaker and PhD student)

From the three narratives above, it is evident that work experience does not always impact on career planning and advancement, and consequently on decision making ability, but it is more the experiences that one is subjected and exposed to that gives the individual the knowledge and acumen to make more informed decisions.

5.3.3. INFLUENCES OF DRIVERS AND BARRIERS IN UAE SOCIETY ON COURSE CHOICE AND THE DECISION TO PURSUE HIGHER STUDIES

Before attempting to embark on a critical analysis of this section, we must revisit the fundamental value systems and societal structure of the UAE as a country. We must also understand that though progressive, the country is still governed by Islamic ways of life and cultural perceptions and norms followed by centuries of tradition.

What are the perceptions of the students entering college today regarding the barriers and drivers that enable or prohibit them from pursuing a course of study in their discipline of choice?

In terms of drivers, students cited positives such as family awareness, an encouraging government policy, scholarship opportunities and greater acceptance of women into the workforce as some of the main drivers on the government level as described in the narratives below

"Definitely the awareness of education and its importance has increased, more parents are now sending their children to learn at higher education institutions even for degrees like PhD where there are lot of locals." (M.A, homemaker, PhD student)

"Surely in UAE now there is no dearth of opportunity for technical and non-technical fields. The greatest support for me is my family, followed by my teachers and of course government policies." (Sheikha Al Ahbabi, MSc engineering student)

I can't see anything that can stop or discouraged Emirati women from work, UAE government and society boost women to have their career and even start their own business. (Athari Al Naqbi, MSc SDBE student and environment sector professional)

However the excerpt below though supporting the line of thought echoed by the above participants, draws a very interesting thought point

"I think the government's actions are beneficial. For universities there are single gender and mixed gender universities. There are also scholarships for women students. As regards utilization, this might take time due to societal problems and stigmas associated. However our culture is evolving and the glass ceiling is breaking." (Amna Al Akraf, finance professional)

What about the barriers? Though there are many voices of positivity echoing progress and change of attitude and possible breaking of the glass ceiling, are there any factors which still limit women from choosing Master's degree's in technical fields?

In terms of barriers, there are still some families who don't like ladies to go and work, this is not because of lack of education, but these 10-20% it is more of a status and prestige issue in society. You cannot expect change in society overnight. Its cultural, its human norms, some things we really can't change. (Nawal Al Qadi, project manager, governmental agency)

Well depends, if you come from those type of families, where study is more of an activity till marriage or basically if the family after marriage is not supportive then it is a problem. But that said and done there are also families that encourage learning. So there are 2 types of

families, one conservative and one liberal. (Fatma Bazargan, research scholar, budding entrepreneur)

Here is another viewpoint on the place of men and women in the workplace as well as normal life

Um.. basically that the work environment is ruled by men. True there is a lot of thrust given to women but she has to do a lot to hold her own and prove her existence within the organization. It's not like as easy as it comes to men. During any meeting for example if a man talks he is expected to be wiser than a lady so if a lady talks she has to prove herself twice as more than what the man does this is what I felt during my meetings at work and even during my time at university. So I feel we have to prove our self twice. (Haifaa Ismail, single, engineer)

From the views described above, we can glean three things, one that the progress in terms of education for an Emirati female is still largely governed by family attitudes and mentality, two, a progressive mentality from the family might still be prohibitive if it deems that work and study for females is unnecessary from a “prestige” point of view. Finally as said above, women have to work “doubly hard” to prove themselves in academia as well as the workplace, represents the other end of the spectrum in terms of progress.

5.4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

From the views described above, it is evident that though much progress has been made over the last 40 years in terms of changing the educational landscape of the country through changes at both governmental and societal level, the effects are still just pervading in gradually.

While on one end from the interview sample we have examples of students who have benefited handsomely from the pro-government policy of providing scholarships for women to pursue study both in the UAE and countries abroad, on the other hand we have accounts describing how after the entire meritorious pursuit, the barriers of culture, gender segmentation and lack of initiatives and guidance lead to a sizeably small number only being represented in the postgraduate study field among Emirati women.

To that end we must say that though what has been achieved in itself is commendable, the current situation is best summed up in the words of Ms. Amna Al Akraf, one of our interviewees.

“As regards utilization, this might take time due to societal problems and stigmas associated. Another point I wish to emphasize as in why women are not coming into technical courses is, since ours is not a technical field oriented economy.”

“While there are not enough jobs for men in the field, how do you think we could stand a chance? This is apart from societal barriers that still do exist in a small way.”

To identify patterns and themes and In order to understand elements of the stories and accounts given by the interviewees they were analyzed into categories and sub groups.

The interviewees’ talk prompted by the questions posed for the first research objective pertaining to the factors influencing postgraduate educational course choice can be categorized as indicated below.

- Family based influences
- Non-family based influences

The main categories listed above can be further classified into sub-categories such as:

- Family based influences
 - Immediate family (father, mother, siblings, husband, father-in law, mother-in-law and children).
 - Close relatives (uncles, aunts and cousins apart from any third degree relatives).
- Non-family based influences
 - Prompted by necessities at work and exposure gained, career advancement prospects.
 - Self interest and motivation to join the course either through initiative or curiosity towards some concept within the discipline of study.
 - Peers (fellow students and/or college faculty and advisor’s motivation)
 - Affirmative government policy beneficiaries (those who availed a government scholarship program to study the course of their choice)

Out of the sample size of ten people, 7 interviewees cited non-family influences as their major reason for their choice of postgraduate degree. 2 of them (Amna, Nawal) cited

necessities caused by experiences at work to be the influence, 3 of them (Fatma, Aamena, Shaikha) cited self interest as the key factor where the key reasons stated were “wanting to move into a banking job”, “the calling of research and wanting to be a pioneer in the field” and “the need for qualification and wanting to move into management positions”

The remaining two interviewees (Athari and Fatmah) cited government initiatives of “green building” and a scholarship with study leave grant respectively as the key factors influencing course choice.

Of those who cited family influences as a leading influence, out of 3 interviewees, two students (M.A, Haifa) said it was their family as well as their university professor, who lead them to make the choice.

Only one out of the entire sample (Ghada) cited her uncle as a leading influence in her course choice by his own example as a role model to follow.

The responses by the interviewees on the questions posed by the second research objective pertaining to whether previous work experience had an impact on career maturity, aspirations and ambitions and consequently on postgraduate educational course choice can be categorized as follows with their sub-categories indicated below.

- Where previous experience has a positive influence on course choice and variables of career aspirations, ambition and maturity.
- Where previous work experience has a negative influence on course choice and variables of career aspirations, ambition and maturity.
- Where previous work experience has had no influence on course choice and variables of career aspirations, ambition and maturity.

Out of the sample size of ten people, 6 interviewees cited that their work experience was a key influence in their course choice (Amna, Nawal, Athari, Haifaa, Ghada and Fatma) with the main reasons being given as “a logical extension of wanting to progress in work” and “the need to be knowledgeable and qualified in ones field” the main reasons.

Two interviewees (Aamena, Shaikha) cited that it was “own personal interest” and “ambition to be a manager” that led them to choose their respective courses.

One interviewee (Fatmah) cited her existing work experience was “frustrating” and she wanted to move into “something different”, that led her to choose her course. In this case, her experience had a negative influence on her course choice. One interviewee in the sample (M.A) had no prior work experience at the time of the interview, therefore her views are not taken for this question.

The responses by the interviewees on the questions posed by the third research objective pertaining to pre- and post- course expectations on course choice can be categorized as follows

- Where course modules and the course in itself was undertaken because of aspirational value.
- Where course modules and the course in itself had no aspirational value for the interviewees.

Out of the sample of ten people, interviewees, six of them (Amna, Fatmah, Ghada, Aamena, Haifaa and Fatma) cited there was strong correlation between different modules available in their courses and the additional knowledge that would be available to them via completing study in these subjects was a main influence in course choice.

Four interviewees (M.A, Shaikha, Athari and Nawal) cited that their course choice had no bearing on the modules within or on their future career aspirations. The reasons given in these cases was “to carry on research”, “learn more about different disciplines”, “interest in green building” and “no particular areas, other than general management”

The responses by the interviewees on the questions posed by the fourth research objective pertaining to their awareness of barriers or promoters in society and work on their course choice can be categorized as follows

- Where there was presence of barriers felt by the students
 - On a social or societal level.
 - In terms of gender.
- Where there were no barriers felt at all either societal or social.

Out of the sample size of ten people, three of the interviewees (Fatmah, Nawal and M.A) felt that barriers did indeed exist in the form of family restrictions, prestige norms and orthodox mentality that prevailed in the rural areas of UAE respectively.

Two other interviewees (Fatma and Haifaa) felt there were barriers that existed in terms of the “glass ceiling” at work and gender bias, that “women had to prove themselves twice, both at university and work” respectively.

The remaining five interviewees (Amna, Athari, Aamena, Shaikha and Ghada) felt that these are no barriers that exist in today’s society in the UAE that restrict the pursuit of education for a female Emirati student. On the contrary, it was made apparent during their interviews that all of them were of the opinion that the government today has introduced many affirmative action policies that sought to encourage participation by means of scholarship programs and training initiatives. A universally echoed opinion was that it was only lack of self initiative today that prohibited an Emirati female from progressing in her field of choice.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The research carried out for this dissertation on Emirati women's preferences with regard to postgraduate course choice is both significant and interesting in terms of value and outcomes, since the results offer a rare insight into the areas of Emirati culture, upbringing and societal and moral factors that influence the minds of young women today.

6.2. FINDINGS VS. LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is interesting to compare and contrast the findings of this research with the classical views represented both in the literature reviewed as well as the theories studied for two important reasons. Firstly, the majority of literature adopts a macro level perspective of the Western world and in only a few micro level examples, reports experience from selected countries in the Arab World. This study has attempted to make a comparative investigation on the predominant factors influencing course choices amongst Emirati women in the UAE. Secondly, the literature reviewed only represented the trends that were possibly present in the respective countries that the research was carried out at that particular point in time.

The UAE today though a young nation of 40+ years, has progressed leaps and bounds in terms of its policies, education system, approaches to teaching and making infrastructure available, to a level that is amongst the most progressive in any of the countries in the Middle East, and offering more potential for becoming a hub for the world's education institutions' to converge on the UAE as a focal point in the region.

Literature reviewed across different time periods by a multitude of authors have frequently commented on the supportive role that Islam has accorded for the education and emancipation of women. True to this in spirit of the word, even the leadership of the UAE has been at the forefront in affirmative action initiatives for encouraging women to study. Even during the course of this set of interviews, despite the small sample size, it was found that more than half of the students interviewed, at some point or other in their academic lives had been assisted or influenced by the presence of grants, scholarships and endowments awarded by the government.

However the main problem as always has been to get societal encouragement and approval for applying for these courses. While in most cases across the sample interviewed, attitudes of parents and society have changed drastically over the years, with many realizing the importance of sending their daughters and wives to study (we had a few married students as well, who commended the support of their families in supporting their academic aspirations), the fact still remains that there are still the age-old prejudices and gender role stereotypes existing in pockets. This was found to be an overarching theme across the whole life cycle of the student's study decision, right from the formative years where they were exposed to what is expected of them, to the terminal years where they actually joined their workplace, only to learn "it's still a man's world; and sometimes we need to prove twice that we are as smart as the others"

The statement above given by one of our interviewees, who is currently studying for Engineering Management, maybe considered a trailblazer in her field and has been a consistent achiever in her field throughout her years of schooling. Yet to see a comment from her reflecting the stark realities of the workplace, leads us to question the extent that attitudes have changed?

An interesting tangent of thought was discussed by one of our interviewees when she said "sometimes families do not wish to send their daughter's to study or work as a matter of status and prestige" which meant that many families still associated the necessity to work by a woman in the UAE, to be a condition only brought about by dire need or circumstance. This was a new learning experience for the researcher who is accustomed to a different work ethic.

With regard to self-perception, achievement and the role of peers and counselling on the course choice variable, across the sample, all the interviewees felt that the initial stages of their life were the most important in forming their views about what they wanted to do in terms of higher education.

The problem however as echoed by all the interviewees was that there were few organized means of influence through counselling sessions or awareness workshops that were carried out at school or even college level to find out and refine the interests of the women students and advise them in channelling their energies towards something that they were passionate about and had a better chance of succeeding at, if chosen as a career path.

In many cases, the interviewees were of the opinion that the courses that they ended up taking, were due to the unavailability of their initial course choices for girls, or because their parents would not allow them to do the course chosen since it was viewed as a “men’s” course, or since they had no other options to pursue in the UAE as their parents would not allow them to go abroad for further studies.

What needs to be stressed here as a point for discussion is that even after many years of educational reform, there are very few focused counselling and career development facilities available at universities in the UAE that could play a pivotal role in ensuring that the right course is opted for by the student with the right inclination. It is an effort enough that the student gets a chance cutting across all existing barriers of society and prejudice to start studying, but there is nothing more disappointing for the student than learning later that this was not what she started out to do. This will lead to disillusionment not only in terms of the self-esteem of the student herself, but also in many cases many years of lost time that can seldom be recouped or critically so even scholarships gone wasted or governmental initiatives under-utilized.

Peer-pressure as evident in the bulk of literature studied was not reported to have a major influence for this sample of interviewees, as in many cases they tended to look up to family (non-sibling and class role models). What did make a difference to more than half of the sample though, was their previous work experience and their “career maturity”. The research found that many of the interviewees were motivated to choose their course due to the necessity of similar qualifications brought up by work requirements and possibilities for promotion. In other cases course choice was spurred by a thirst for knowledge prompted by the need to understand more comprehensively fundamental concepts used at work.

Parental perception as mentioned in the literature though, did play a key role in determining course choice. The interviewees, irrespective of marital status, felt that the family’s support was vital in ensuring that they could opt for and successfully complete their course of choice.

This was especially noted in case of married interviewees, whose needs of equally balancing study and family life was vital. They said that the parental perception of them being successful at home as good mothers and wives along with that of being a qualified person, along with the support they provided in terms of taking care of children during university hours, was a key influence in their opting for a post-graduate program. The influences at school and that of professors was also found to be decisive with two

interviewees citing a direct influence via means of suggestion and encouragement by their professor as a major motivation for them to undertake their course of study.

A combination of influences both familial as well as external can clearly be seen as the key influencing factors for education and choices of Emirati women today. Some interviewees have also stated that in the same family, the attitude of their parents towards encouraging their older siblings for pursuing education was different and more conservative in comparison with today, a clear indication of how times have changed.

What is noteworthy is also that more families and institutions have been according a new found pride and prestige in having educated women at home and as part of the workplace respectively.

Workplace parity though remains the only area of concern. Though the numbers of Emirati women across different industries have definitely gone up from the previous years, many of them still feel that the environment in companies is still male dominated and not women friendly. This has however been a “mixed-blessing of sorts with many Emirati women branching out as entrepreneurs as a result.

6.3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion though there are a variety of themes that may not have been discussed or divulged by the interviewees, that the researcher is cognizant of, the following common threads that have emerged from this research.

Though education has made rapid progress in the four decades since the formation of the nation, work needs to be done in spreading greater awareness of career prospects and different courses available. Only if there is a systematic endeavour to do so, can we aim for a more aware student body that seeks to make choices out of informed knowledge rather than a chance based process.

On a social level attitudes towards education and change still need to be accepted especially amongst certain sections of society for the education initiative to really develop and consolidate. Unless the gender stereotyping stops and both rural and urban communities are equally encouraged, achieving educational parity will remain a distant dream.

Counselling initiatives at present are minimal and in many planes do not address many of the compelling questions that the students have in their minds, especially during their

formative years. The presence of more of these initiatives and targeted guidance centres can go a long way in developing an informed student pool.

In addition to all of the observations above, it would be helpful if more courses in micro and macro specialization areas of particular “hard” scientific disciplines are instituted at universities across the country to ensure that students do not have to choose a course which is not of their liking or inclination.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1. THE WAY FORWARD – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION

As discussed in detail through the course of this dissertation, a number of theories in the literature have been reviewed, as well as empirical research reporting the real-life experiences and narratives of students of different socio-economic and educational backgrounds at the post-graduate level.

The UAE today and the success it has achieved in some areas of education is a potential role model for other nations not only in the Arab World but also worldwide.

What are the ways forward for the advancement of women in technical education? Let us examine certain key areas.

7.1.1. THE ROLE OF EMIRATI WOMEN IN SUPPORTING OTHER WOMEN

As seen in the literature review as well as in the stories narrated by various interviewees, students were more likely to follow a course of choice if they had a positive influencing force in the form of a role model either in society or at work on a macro level and primarily from the home at a micro level to encourage them to enrol for the course of study.

While the literature chronicles the stories of various firsts in the various sectors of aviation, politics, engineering and even police and judiciary, that have served as role models for several others to come into the field, the researcher feels, there is a need for continuous positive reinforcement both in terms of multiple role models appearing at various points of time and also the provision of a large number of role models that are appropriate for a prospective student to emulate.

It is largely a continuous symbiotic process. The more students go into technical courses, the more are the chances for prospective role models to receive an education and graduate from national higher education institutes of repute. Some of them might even go abroad and achieve greater distinction and come back and serve their country,

thereby becoming a flag bearer for a whole generation of prospective aspirants in her field of excellence.

The key factor here is to ensure that certain high performing students are picked up and honed to develop a liking for their fields of talent irrespective of what is “socially the norm” at a particular point in time. Only then can we aspire to have a continuous unbroken chain in terms of excellence in both education and the development of human capital as a result of it.

7.1.2. THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONS IN SUPPORTING WOMEN

Conversely it is worth noting that usually the course of choice in terms of education is also largely influenced by organizational support and the prospects of getting a job after completing a course of study. While none of the interviewees reported any problems in getting a job after completion of their courses their views were best divided into two main lines of thought. One which was of the opinion that they did not get opportunities commensurate to their field of study, i.e. they had to work in fields which was not related to their field of study since they did not find proper jobs in that field. The second group was of the opinion that though they were fortunate to get absorbed by organizations that were supportive to their career aspirations and they were placed in a designation equal to their qualification, many times however they expressed the view that they felt discriminated against and felt they were given jobs which were less intensive and not as important as the assignments given to their male counterparts.

Organizations must realize that equal opportunities and on part treatment of the female qualified workforce is the only way to ensure workforce parity and continuous commitment of qualified human capital especially among the female workforce in the organization. The more they feel marginalized or relegated to positions of lesser significance, their morale will go down and eventually this stifling of talent will lead to dejection and loss of valuable human capital resources. Organizations, if they really intend to encourage women, should have some sort of affirmative action in terms of a reservation quota system for women in technical fields to ensure gender balance, just like they have in the Federal National Congress and many other governmental sections.

7.1.3. THE ROLE OF THE UAE GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING WOMEN

The UAE government has been extremely proactive in bolstering and supporting women’s education and emancipation initiatives across the country. There are today,

various scholarship programs and affirmative action initiatives that enable many students especially women to undertake courses of their choice not only within the country but also at the finest universities abroad. However as much ground that has been gained, there is still a lot of work to be done especially in the rural areas of the country. One point that is worthwhile to note is that some students had travelled long distances from rural parts of the country to the city for education. An area of recommendation would be to open up more universities or nodal centres of universities in the rural areas so the Emirati female population living in these areas can also have access to the same standards of education as their city counterparts, without having to commute long distances and face opposition from their parents for the same. Closer proximity to their residence ensures that they can study without much hindrance and will make the process of education an enjoyable and community immersive one.

7.1.4. THE ROLE OF MENTORING AND COUNSELLING IN SUPPORTING UAE WOMEN

The success of many a professional in the world has been attributed to the presence and influence of a coach or mentor. Whether it be providing moral support and encouragement or giving technical advice, the role of mentors and counsellors is definitely vital. Given the landscape of the UAE and the possible conservatism, especially in rural backgrounds, there is a firm need for more female mentors, coaches and counsellors, whom themselves are very experienced and distinguished to hold periodic sessions with students, guide and inspire them towards achieving their life's calling, aspirations and ambitions by making a right choice in terms of education. The bulk of our interviewees reported that the counselling initiatives at their own universities left a lot to be desired and at many times was a sporadic effort and not an continuous development program, with many of them wanting to get more information and guidance and there being an absence of a resource person or materials to guide them at the right time in the right direction.

The governing bodies of various institutions of higher education in the UAE right from the primary levels should ensure that there are proper mentors and counsellors available to guide the student in a holistic fashion both from a mental as well as an intellectual plane, taking into account their condition whether personal or societal.

Once this is done, the researcher feels there will definitely be a renaissance in terms of education for women in the country.

7.2. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

During the course of this research, various other topics were revealed to the researcher that would be worth completing further research on. The researcher feels that if research is conducted on the topics below, it could serve to give greater and more holistic insight into researches such as these, as any research problem in itself is influenced by a multitude of causes which are inter-linked and a careful study of each of the parts of a whole will lead one to understanding the root cause better.

- Women's higher education choices, a qualitative study of high-school students.
- Women's career choices and career development – do their aspirations and actual jobs relate to each other?
- Role of peer group and the family in postgraduate study decisions.
- Role of higher education institutions in motivating students for research based degrees – a study of 10 PhD students.
- Role of employers in facilitating postgraduate study, motivation and career prospects.
- Role of government in developing appropriate policies.

7.3. CONCLUSION

As with any research there are a multitude of views that a researcher comes across and is influenced by during the course of his/her activity. The challenge within this research was though being a male, the researcher had to undertake research of a totally narrative nature, getting women Emirati students to talk about their aspirations and ambitions sometimes in a very personal way. Though initially there was some hindrance in breaking the ice, the experience in itself rewarded the researcher with some great insights about the ground realities of educational parity and post educational employment blues faced by Emirati women, from a cultural and gender standpoint. This led the researcher to understand that the problems encountered by women across the world are common and not unique in themselves sparing certain differences that may be brought about by cultural differences.

It is hoped that this research in particular, despite its limitations in the form of scope and sample size has served the purposes of enlightening the reader on certain key

psychological and social factors that influence course choice in “hard” technical areas instead of conventional fields for Emirati women. The recommendations outlined within this report it is hoped would also provide an ideal frame of reference for researchers desirous of continuing advanced study in this field.

In conclusion some of the key insights the researcher gained were about the key influences affecting course choice among Emirati women and that the choice was not one determined by a single variable of own will alone, but a choice brought about by several variables ranging from family and peer influences including motivation from role models outside the family such as university professors.

Brief inroads were made into studying the gender disparity and how societal conditioning influences course choice, but it was found that though the stereotyping existed, what was more disheartening to the students was that they still had to struggle for good jobs matching their qualifications and often complained they were frustrated with the glass ceiling despite all empowerment initiatives.

We must realize that true women’s empowerment is not only a result of facilitation by means of providing opportunities and infrastructure, but in terms of true progress that will only happen when we view women as equals, as forces that can transform through their own education both the home and hearth, the future generations and the very companies that they work for.

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Appendix

Interview #1

Ms Amna Al Akraf an MSc in Finance and Banking student of Buid, previously of Zayed University, currently working with the Government of Dubai as a Financial Auditor.

SS: What were the different events, and role models and influential people who probably motivated you to enroll for an MSc in Finance and Banking?

AA: Specifically in Finance and Banking.. um perhaps y career and the thought that maybe getting a higher certification in the field maybe an enhancement to my career, because I work as an auditor.

Also like I come from a family with a lot of emphasis on higher education so I think all of...that contributed to my choices.

SS: Is anyone in your family in the finance and banking sector?

AA: No. They are all in um.. different kinds of technical areas.

SS: So would it be right to say that it was primarily your profession which motivated you to take an MSc in Finance and Banking?

AA: Um..well I was an A student and I had the highest GPA when I graduated from university and having worked in a similar field for 3 years after graduation, I think work experience and self motivation were the key driving factors

SS: Prior to coming to this course, what paid jobs have you done so far?

AA: So far I have my current job as a government financial auditor with the Government of Dubai, I have not changed jobs since.

SS: Is your UG degree is also finance?

AA: Yes im pretty much in the same field.

SS: How do you think a degree in Finance and Banking from Buid help you?

AA: What I liked about Buid is the research background, exchanging knowledge with peers in the same field. These are the reasons I chose Buid as I did not want an easy going course. I hope the course will help me due to the recognition and reputation Buid has.

SS: Which areas of the Msc are most enjoyable to you and which is most difficult?

AA: So far I haven't seen much of the course so I cannot comment, but one thing I really enjoy is the group discussions with classmates because they give you a

different view. Also I am unsure of how much of theoretical knowledge alone is relevant to the workplace, daily, but the knowledge shared is more relevant.

SS: What parts are challenging actually? Why I ask this is due to the degree's research focus.

AA: Yes. Specifically the research oriented bits in terms of access and data collection are difficult.

SS: Why do you say that?

AA: For example if I needed to access Bankscope a specific bank research oriented database, which is needed for my course, I have to go to university as there is no extranet and there is only one seat and one access terminal as access to resources then becomes a challenge for a research based course.

SS: Do you find your coursework is relevant to your work?

AA: Not really, many times the coursework is not work related, like bank auditing for example, as a government auditor I never need to audit a bank.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

AA: Most of my family has a Bachelor's Degree, Master's or a PhD. I have a Bachelor's in Finance from Zayed University.

SS: So you mean to say you are the second or third generation of educated people in your family?

AA: No No... what I meant by family is only my siblings, before that my past generations.. as you know the education system in the UAE was not so advanced 30 years ago. So the generation before me, my dad and all are educated but not my grandparents.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

AA: I think it is mainly family. When I was young I had a lot of encouragement from the family to study further since I was a good student and this is definitely one of the drivers. Barrier wise I feel there are none.

SS: Do you think the encouragement and initiatives from the UAE government are bearing fruit and are being properly utilized?

AA: I think the government's actions are beneficial. For universities there are single gender and mixed gender universities. There are also scholarships for women students. As regards utilization, this might take time due to societal

problems and stigmas associated. However our culture is evolving and the glass ceiling is breaking.

SS: Do you think there are enough opportunities for women's careers today?

AA: Yes from my experience what I feel is there is no dearth of jobs for qualified Emirati women today. I got a job as soon as I graduated, within a week. There were many interview calls and jobs.

SS: How do you think institutions can help further?

AA: I think in relevance to your study, the main reasons that women are not coming into technical courses is simply because there are few options for engineering and hard courses for women at undergraduate level.

Another point I wish to emphasize as in why women are not coming into technical courses is since ours is not a technical field oriented economy, while there are not enough jobs for men in the field, how do you think we could stand a chance. This is apart from societal barriers that still do exist in a small way.

I think as an economy focusing on education slowly we have progressed a long way, but these initiatives have to be given time to evolve with the generations to be more useful

SS: Is there anything else you feel our interview should have covered or that you want to ask me?

AA: No. Thank you for this opportunity.

Interview #2

Ms Athari Khamis Al Naqbi an MSc in School of design and built environment (SDBE), student of Buid, previously of Zayed University, currently working with the Emirates environmental agency.

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in ...SDBE.....?

AN: I was curious about the green building since Dubai municipality announced their new green building code in 2007

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here?

AN: I worked for 7 years in Sharjah planning and surveying directorate. My study differs from my work and I might change it once I finish my degree.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

AN: I enjoyed all the modules that dealt with the energy efficiency and I was not comfortable with the ones that have an architectural background.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

AN: I'm one of the second generation working women in my family. I studied in governmental university and high school.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

AN: I can't see anything that can stop or discouraged Emirati women from work, UAE government and society boost women to have their career and even start their own business.

SS: Is there anything else you feel our interview should have covered or that you want to ask me?

AN: Not really.

Interview # 3

Aamena Al Shamsi, MSc Information Technology student. She is currently enrolled for a PhD in Project Management at Masdar Institute for Science and Technology

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in Information Technology?

AS: I enrolled for an MSc in IT since my undergraduate degree was a Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems, but um.. I felt that it was rather light and not so concentrated as in I mean it had some courses in business and management but did not really engage me much. Sometime in the course of the degree I developed a liking for IT and discovered I wanted to make this a career, so the choice.

SS: How did you come to know you liked IT more, was it because of the subject or the influence of the teachers or the students who studied with you?

AS: Well actually 2 things. First the teachers themselves, they persuaded us to continue the Master's, then I like the subjects and then when I graduated from my undergraduate I realized I wanted a career in IT and did not have a rich enough background so went in for this course.

SS: Were there any other influences, other than your teachers ?

AS: Well it's not actually as if there were plenty of influences, I researched and went ahead as well, when you are a student, you cant really keep waiting for motivation to make a choice forever (laughs)

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here because of the Master's Degree?

AS: Okay. After I graduated and had my Bachelors I have worked for 3 years in an institute, it's a kind of university actually as an administrator. Um.. the job had nothing to do with my qualifications actually and then I joined the course.

After a year of study at BuiD I found that the job I was doing was not really aligned to what I wanted to do as a career and so I quit that job. Then during the first year I found a job as an IT programmer at a private firm locally and I must say this interested me more as it was related to what I was studying. I stayed in this job for a year and a half till I graduated from BuiD and then I applied for a PhD at Masdar Institute of Science and Technology full time in Computing and Information Science which I got accepted into. Nowadays I am engaged not only as a student but as a Research Assistant as well so I had to quit my job.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

AS: The most enjoyable field is learning from data, and the parts on how to research. As regards the part which is most challenging I found them to be data mining and artificial intelligence. They were new topics to me that is why in the beginning they were challenging.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

AS: There are 6 siblings of us has master's degrees and each one of us is specialized in a different field and each of us are in a different career.

SS: And your parents? What are they doing?

AS: Well my dad passed away in 1996, he was a businessman, actually in his time, they did not have schools here, he was literate, he went to muttawal. A religious school where basics of religion, some maths and language was taught. Same also my mother

SS: Isn't it remarkable that despite their backgrounds, they encouraged you to study higher and higher?

AS: Well my dad was very insistent for us to be independent and look after ourselves, that's why he gave us the best education possible and he told us to believe in yourself and do the thing we liked without any pressure. I can't exactly explain how this actually led to our choices but yes there was an impact definitely on my other siblings as well.

SS: And your siblings how many of them are elder to you?

AS: I'm the youngest of 4 girls and 2 boys.

SS: You have a very interesting educational background first thing with a Bachelors and a Master's degree and now to a PhD. It is a very rare thing to see someone taking a PhD in the developing world in Arabia being a woman. Can you tell me what was your motivation?

AS: Actually the motivation was that I liked research and did not want routine jobs and repetitive work. I like to think out of the box itself. I thought that the Masdar research and its contribution to renewable energy was remarkable. I was curious to contribute more back to the country. I asked people how to apply and in 2010 they had only the masters. Then in 2011, when they opened up PhD, I had one dilemma whether to go for PhD or a day job but my advisor Dr Iyad Rahwan motivated me to go for it.

SS: What do you want to do post PhD. Do you want to become a faculty or go into industry?

AS: Actually I do not have a plan right now. I want to do both. Not to restrict myself only to teaching or industry, because I need variety in my life.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

AS: Actually I do not think there are any barriers now. But in terms of the drivers, I think there is a lot of encouragement given from the government and support from the family for women to come and study.

SS: Why is it then that the students who study, particularly Emirati women's despite good marks go for management and business more than technical?

AS: Actually I do not think there is any shortage, for technical women students even, for example at Masdar we have so many majors which are technical and have women in it.

SS: Are your colleagues full time or part time?

AS: All are full time as we are all engaged in research as well.

SS: Is there anything else you would like to add?

AS: Well, I would like to say that girls now are in all majors. But there is another issue. Even after completing these majors, they may not find jobs matching their qualifications, but we can't just generalize, true men have it easy in a job front, but for women it is different, even if they graduate as engineer or technical positions, we cannot be assured of a job, even though the country needs technical positions to be filled.

Interview # 4

Fatma Ahmed Bazargan, Master's in Project Management. Currently a PhD scholar at Khalifa University of Science and Technology for Project Management.

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in Information Technology?

FB: I would say it was more events than people that led me to take my course of study because when I completed my undergraduate study, which was in 2002 my Bachelors in Computer Science, I took up a Network Administrator's role and I saw after a year that throughout the career there is a lot of knowledge I needed to have and that's when I wanted to do my Master's and I did my Bachelors at AUS and Masters in IT and Computer Systems Security in Cardiff University.

SS: What was your motivation to do this?

FB: I wanted to do this Master's and at the same time, there was this program by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Foundation, who were sending Emiratis for higher studies abroad. Despite the toughness of the program, I was confident I would get in because of my academics and the fact that the number of applicants at the Master's level are very less. That also in Computer Security.

SS: So you would be quite a rare person?

FB: Yes I would say both my experience as well as my qualifications with the fact that I am an Emirati woman have made me one of the pioneers in the fields of information and computer security. I think its because I exploited the right opportunities that came my way.

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far?

FB: I started with Thuraya Satellite Company as a Network Administrator, then I went did my Master's and came back, got recruited as the 6th employee in the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority when it was established in 2004, I started as a Network Engineer and by 2006 I became the IT Manager of TRA. Then I talked to them of a project of CERT which is a computer emergency system and I was the founder of that project. I left because later I accepted an offer to work with MASDAR in Abu Dhabi to be the Information Security Manager for the whole city's logical and physical security.

What then happened is during 2009 there was a financial crisis and all projects at MASDAR stopped and everything became routine. That's when I decided to quit and pursue my PhD from Khalifa University in Information Security Engineering.

SS: How do you see your career developing from here after breaking the glass ceiling armed with a PhD and being a pioneer?

FB: I would love to give back to the society in the form of teaching, even now I am teaching Bachelor's students. I also did my EMBA side by side because I wanted to form and run my own information security company. Because I believe now time has come to work for myself rather than going back to industry.

SS: Obviously such success would not be possible without support. Please tell me the story of your family background, and their influence?

FB: I would say I come from a middle income family, I have been fortunate to have parents who always told me that I must not depend on anybody even if I need a penny, I think this transformed my attitude because very early in life I learn't that I had to study to be independent and successful and run twice as fast than anyone else. They were a great influence in my life.

In terms of brothers and sisters I have 4 brothers and sisters all happen to be bankers, I am the only one remotely connected to science. I am the second after my eldest brother.

My dad passed away in 2001 and my mom was working as an Ultrasonographer in Dubai hospital but is retired now.

In terms of study, I studied in a government school. The time I was studying 1993-1997 the private schools has just started and at that point of time government schools were the best.

SS: You say "at that point of time" – are the standards in government schools same today?

FB: Of course not! Once the private schools started coming up and people became more educated in the UAE, they started believing private schools are better than public schools and so the standards at public schools started degrading.

SS: Given the standards gone down and assuming if a young Emirati woman from a poorer background came to these schools, do you think she could make it big?

FB: Of course! Let me take my example. I think more than school, parental coaching plays a big role. My parents were fluent in English when I was growing up because they studied in Bombay, India in their years of study. This helped me to get fluent despite a fully Arabic medium of instruction. Now for example when I teach Bachelor's students at Khalifa University who come from a government school, their English is poor. I believe that made a difference to me was the way I was nurtured at home.

SS: Do you think stereotyping with regards to studying and cultural norms exists?

FB: Well depends, if you come from those type of families, where study is more of an activity till marriage or basically if the family after marriage is not supportive

then it is a problem. But that said and done there are also families that encourage learning. So there are 2 types of families, one conservative and one liberal.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

FB: I would say research part of both the degrees is difficult, but something that is challenging and enjoyable at the same time is to prevent your research from being a book of knowledge and to incubate and innovate that idea to being of use to the people around you.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers today?

FB: Um.. I would say today there are lot of opportunities for Emirati women to excel in research or industry, because today for example, I was able to do my PhD at Khalifa University just because I got a scholarship from Sheikh Khalifa to study for free. So it's a really beneficial thing for someone who wants to study. The fees is AED 200,000 per year, which is not there for me. Now also there are lot of organizations which will support your ideas to do a business and realize your dream etc.

At the same time despite all these opportunities, there are also some hurdles. Because as I told you in UAE society there are 2 types of people close minded and open minded people. Problem is there are still a lot of closed minded old generation people filling top positions at organizations across government and semi government. What happens is when they see a woman's CV coming on their table, they will ignore it! And however if they see a guys CV they will take it forward. So it so happens that although I am so qualified, unless they allow us to we will never reach to senior and Director position it is very difficult. It is rare to see someone at that level in comparison with Emirati men

SS: So you see there are certain prejudices that do exist?

FB: Yes, we can maximum reach to the senior management level but never to the C level.

SS: Are there any other things you would like to add?

FB: I would like to say that even women have a future in technical and science subjects and there is no dearth of jobs for right qualified candidates. What is important is that they try.

Interview #5

Ghada Al Shaiba is a MSc Project Management student at Buid currently working with the RTA and is one of the rare graduates in the field with an undergraduate degree in Software Engineering Technology

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in?

GS: Basically I have done my Master's Degree in Project Management from BuiD. My undergraduate degree was Bachelor's in Software Engineering Technology.

SS: When you were growing up did you have any role models specifically who encouraged you to take up this course?

GS: Well since my childhood, when I was like 9 years old.. umm my ambition was to be an architect, but as I grew up I noticed the movement and growth in technology and specifically IT, so my dream was initially to be an architect, but later I was influenced by the developments in IT and joined HCT – Dubai Women's College and pursued Software Engineering technology.

Another thing which I must point out that influenced me to do this course is that I would be a pioneer (laughs).. umm as not many women students have done this kind of course. Because of this coming back to your question I had no firm role models, but you may count my uncle who was a Technical Engineer as one of my first influences in engineering.

SS: You said the industry and your uncle influenced you, were any friends and teachers also part of this initiative?

GS: No. Not really because by the time I completed my bachelor's I was already working and it is from work , the industry know-how and its exposure that I got influenced to do the course

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here?

GS: First I started as an Officer and IT Specialist and moved on to Sr. Officer. While I was studying master's I got a promotion as Sr. Project Manager with the Roads and Transport Authority in Dubai.

In terms of career development, my main aim for studying was to gain knowledge. Project management was not very far from IT. For me it was important to find a touchpoint between both disciplines after evaluating the connection.

I feel my career would definitely have to be one in leadership, consultancy or that of a portfolio manager or a teacher in project management, actually my ambition is to be a Minister! using the expertise and practical experience I have in both disciplines as not many women are in senior positions in IT in the UAE

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult?; and why?

GS: The most difficult for me was cost and value management and this was because it was one of my first modules, then it was the research methods module. In terms of enjoyable areas, program and portfolio management.. I cant exactly recall, yes and planning and resource management, people and culture and organization.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

GS: I studied in government schools from KG to grade 12. In terms of family, we are 4, I am the oldest. My parents both are retired, my mom was a teacher, then she moved into an assistant manager. My dad was with the UAE Army.

My other sisters are studying in college and my brother is working.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

GS: The main barrier is the self-interest. There are not many ladies who are undertaking research, dissertations or master's in a particular field. Also rarely you can find ladies who completed all the courses and come to work.

As in terms of drivers, sure the government is supporting for me and family first and then the country, so I did my education from my own funds.

SS: Are there any barriers still in UAE for education?

GS: Like I said earlier the number one barrier is themselves and their will as they often get fed up. The second is the normal thing, they get married have kids and they say they can't balance both. Thirdly there is the perception of people and societal factors even though there is great encouragement from the rulers of this country for choices and scholarships.

SS: Is there anything else you feel our interview should have covered or that you want to ask me?

GS: I think going abroad for most Emirati women still remains a challenge from society. Especially in case of courses which do not have good higher education opportunities in UAE. I think global exposure will do us good. But even in my

case though there was no restriction initially, my mother continuously forbade me to go with a lot of reasons, which I finally agreed to.

SS: Do you have any regrets, is the standard here as good as abroad?

GS: Absolutely not! No regrets whatsoever, I feel the standard here is as good as anywhere else. It totally depends upon the person and his ambition where it takes him, education is just a key, there are lot of other factors that make an individual successful. As a parting message, my ambition is to do my PhD.

Interview #6

Interview of Haifaa Ismail Mohammed Sharif, Master's in Civil Engineering student at American University of Sharjah. Currently also working at Dubai Water and Electricity Authority (DEWA) .

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for a Master's in Civil Engineering?

HM: I am currently a student for a Master's degree in Civil Engineering from the American University of Sharjah, previously I graduated from the same university with a Bachelor's in Civil Engineering. The most influential people most definitely was first my mother, then it was my advisor at university as he saw my interest in the specific field of environmental engineering. So my advisor back in the Bachelor's degree after seeing my performance and projects encouraged me.

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far and what do you do for a living? And how do you see your career developing from here because of the Master's Degree?

HM: Yea I am currently working as Asset Management and I undertake maintenance for DEWA 132 and 400 KV substations, for me as a management person I have to more or less manage the work that people in the maintenance team do in terms of budget and schedule also performance of the team in terms of reaching the performance of the teams against objectives. Prior to this I was an intern at DEWA, and I got into DEWA after Bachelor's.

SS: How do you see your career developing from here post Master's ?

HM: Actually there are a lot of opportunities since to find an Emirati girl with a Master's degree in engineering is a rare thing. The master's degree I feel has empowered me with a certain extent of critical thinking and professionalism that allow me to stand out when compared to a fellow female student with less qualifications for example.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

HM: The most enjoyable field is the environmental impacts of Civil Engineering, since I feel it can change a lot and I would like to do some changes that are remarkable, I would like to do a ground breaking thesis on environment that would impact people's lives. The most challenging subject I think is management because it keeps evolving and changing, you are dealing with human beings and not structures alone.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

HM: I have a mother whose done a Diploma from the UK, and my father did not study after 12th grade. In my brother's my eldest brother has a Bachelor's Degree in Chemical Engineering, second one is having a Master's in Finance and Accounting and the third one is doing his PhD in mechatronics and my 4th brother is doing Bachelors in finance and my sister is in school. I am the 4th of 6 siblings.

SS: Coming from a large educated family of siblings, did their study and courses influence you in any way as you were growing up?

HM: Ah yes of course right from my mother who encouraged us throughout as well as my siblings were a positive influence who kept encouraging us to study.

SS: Which school did you study in and what courses did you take during your school days?

HM: I studied in Doha private school in Sharjah and it was pure science subjects nothing to do with business or management subjects.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers today?

HM: Um.. basically that the work environment is ruled by men. True there is a lot of thrust given to women but she has to do a lot to hold her own and prove her existence within the organization. It's not like as easy as it comes to men. During any meeting for example if a man talks he is expected to be wiser than a lady so if a lady talks she has to prove herself twice as more than what the man does this is what I felt during my meetings at work and even during my time at university. So I feel we have to prove our self twice.

SS: What about the positives? Are the women of today more fortunate and privileged with government support and other initiatives?

HM: It is very rare, but still the number of women coming forth into technical field are very rare as you can count how many are coming forth, since there are not many and there will be more chances, but in the future there may be more qualified persons and this might actually make it really competitive for even women Emirati's to come up

SS: Is there anything else you would like to add?

HM: No, I think the conversation covered all the main areas of what problems we faced.

Interview #7

*Interview of M.A, Currently a PhD scholar at BuiD for Project Management.
(**prefers to be anonymous**)*

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in Project Management?

MA: Mainly my parents, my mother she really encouraged me to enroll in the Master's program. During school and college not really I did not have any role models.

SS: What was your undergraduate degree in? And why did you make this choice?

MA: My Bachelor's degree was in Finance. I was initially interested in Finance and then after the course I felt Project Management could be the next addition to my career.

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far and what do you do for a living? And how do you see your career developing from here because of the Master's Degree?

MA: I have no professional working experience other than being a student.

SS: How do you see your career developing from here post Master's ?

MA: Well after my Bachelors and my Master's in Project Management, I have become very interested in this field, so I have enrolled for a PhD in Project Management.

In terms of what I would like to do, I would definitely want to start working. My first preference is for research than an industry job.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

MA: To be honest they are all challenging. I enjoyed Research Methods as it is very generic, I don't really remember the others but there was a course on quantitative methods which was a bit challenging.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

MA: Before my bachelors degree I studied in Latifa school for Girls in GCSE system which was British based, and my major was in English Literature.

SS: That's quite a surprise! How did you go from English Literature into Finance and then Project Management?

MA: Yes. But I still enjoy languages, but I enjoy both technical and non-technical fields and it is because I am interested in it.

SS: What about your siblings?

MA: In terms of family I have 2 brothers and 3 sisters,. My other sister has done her Master's in International Relations. I am the second eldest in the family.

SS: What about your parents?

MA: My mother is not working. She studied in the American University in Dubai and my father works in the Real Estate sector

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers today?

MA: Um.. I don't think there are any barriers to be honest, there may have been barriers in the past because of lack of availability of courses and cultural barriers, but now there are no barriers I think. That's what I feel.

SS: What about the positives? Is there increased family and government support?

MA: Definitely the awareness of education and its importance has increased, more parents are now sending their children to learn at higher education institutions even for degrees like PhD.

SS: What about the positives? Is there increased family and government support?

MA: Definitely the awareness of education and its importance has increased, more parents are now sending their children to learn at higher education institutions even for degrees like PhD where there are lot of locals.

SS: Are there other Emirati women in your class of PhD, how many are women?

MA: I think in our cohort there are 6 on 10 students, many of whom have completed higher degrees from other institutions.

SS: What is your opinion and take on the educational landscape and opportunities viz. higher learning for Emirati women, are you satisfied?

MA: Well I think from where we started we have done really well and the standards of education here are really high. For example BuiD in terms of research trains you really well.

SS: Were you looking for jobs after any of your degrees?

MA: At the time of finishing my Bachelor's I was not looking for jobs but after Master's I did apply but did not get any calls till now.

SS: Are there any other things you would like to add?

MA: I think one question for sure that you must ask is why they are taking the degrees that they choose to study for. For example I do know of certain Emirati men who take certain courses only to enhance career prospects and not out of interest.

You could also check on the market and the dynamics that drives students to take courses.

SS: How do you think from an industry and a social point that your life would change post a PhD?

MA: I do not think that only a degree would contribute for much more than an entry in the professional field since for the profession you need good experience also. However from a cultural view, now things are changing and it is really looked upon highly if you do complete a Master's degree and do higher studies. It's not culturally preferred, but those who do it, it is considered as a big deal! The families do value it.

SS: How do you think men would rate more of the Emirati female contemporaries getting qualified in society and industry?

MA: Its definitely valued

Interview #8

Nawal Al Qadi is a student of MSc Engineering Management at Abu Dhabi University. Her undergraduate degree is in IT networking and information systems. She currently works with the UAE Environmental Agency.

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in Engineering Management?

NQ: Nothing in particular, but I was generally interested in IT and systems. However in terms of the masters, there was a choice since I wanted to move into management field after having experienced the theory and operational side of IT.

In terms of role models, I have no one in particular, since I was the first in my family to study in this field.

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here?

NQ: I currently work as a Project Manager with the UAE environmental agency. Actually it is the first year in this course for me so I really don't know what the future will be like, but I hope to become a Project Director or a PMO Manager.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

NQ: I don't specifically have any areas I don't like or find difficult, but I especially like the management elements in my degree.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

NQ: My family is a big one comprising 10 members. My father is a businessman, he has own business. My mother is a university graduate. My sister is a university graduate in business and she is an HR Director. 2 of my sisters are lawyers, one of my sisters is also a dentist!

In terms of studies, I studied in a government school and took science in my formative years.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

NQ: The main factor is the government's encouragement and the push from the rulers. I think this has made a major difference compared to the years before.

In terms of barriers, there are still some families who don't like ladies to go and work, this is not because of lack of education, but these 10-20% it is more of a status and prestige issue in society. You cannot expect change in society overnight. Its cultural, its human norms, some things we really can't change.

Sometimes it's also the other way round, the individual interest is also not there to study and they like to depend on their families, they are comfortable as it is as their families provide for them.

SS: Do you think there is enough participation in technical courses by women in courses like engineering and IT and environment management, also are there enough opportunities after these kind of courses?

NQ: Participation of course is there, as there are women in virtually every field now, but opportunities may not be there, for example I did my undergraduate in IT but afterwards did not get suitable opportunities in the same fields. Later I took Engineering Management as a Master's. This does not mean however that I took engineering management because I did not get anything else, it was because I was really interested in it.

SS: Is there anything else you feel our interview should have covered or that you want to ask me?

NQ: No.

Interview #9

Shaikha Al Ahbabi is studying MSc in Engineering Management from Abu Dhabi University and has worked for the Dewan's Office – Representative of Western Region as an intern and as an IT Officer in a private company before coming to study.

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in?

SA: I am currently doing a Master's in Engineering Management from the Abu Dhabi University. My Bachelor's degree was in IT with special emphasis on information security from UAE university.

As regards factors which influenced my choice I did this degree because I was naturally interested in information security and my Master's in engineering management was due to the need to also learn management in parallel.

I did not have any other role models or any other events other than self-interest which led me to take this course.

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here?

SA: In the last six months I have worked as a Customer Service Staff in Al Taha Company. I have also worked as an intern in the Dewan's Representative Office for Western Region as an IT Officer.

In terms of career I think my future would be as an Engineer.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And Why?

SA: I like project management, quality engineering, applied theory and in terms of toughness nothing yet

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

SA: Yes. I have my big brother, he is now studying for PhD in USA in political science, my mother completed a trade diploma in Egypt and my father just completed graduation.

Only my father works, and he works as an HR Manager in one of the government institutions.

SS: What drivers and barriers do you see in work and society for Emirati women's careers?

SA: Surely in UAE now there is no dearth of opportunity for technical and non-technical fields. The greatest support for me is my family, followed by my teachers and of course government policies.

In terms of barriers, there is nothing now other than that of the students own mind limitations, they have went over all of them now. Nothing like that exists anymore.

SS: What was your major in school and was it your first choice? Also how did you come to know about IT as a degree option?

SA: My major in school was Science and yes it was my first choice. As regards IT as a career option after school, I took two supplementary courses in IT which got me interested in it.

SS: Then why did you not do a Master's also in IT as further specialization?

SA: Because I believe today we must know a little bit of every field to be competitive. Engineering management gives me the chance to see the management side also after the operations side.

Expanding ones knowledge and having two different certifications, one in leadership and management and the other in operations is very useful.

SS: Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

SA: I see myself as a successful leader and manager

SS: Is there anything else you feel our interview should have covered or that you want to ask me?

SA: No

Interview #10

Interview of Fatma Mohammed Saeed Al Yammahi, MSc Finance and Banking student at BuiD. Also a mother of 5 and a student from a non-urban background.

SS: What were the different events and influential people that encouraged you to enroll for an MSc in Finance and Banking?

FM: I work as a Math teacher for the Ministry of Education, there they give us a chance for study leave with full salary during the two years of studying Masters so I find it a good chance for me. Also my family and my husband encouraged me and they find it also it's a good opportunity to develop myself and my work. I choose finance uh.. to complete my Master's in this field.

SS: But basically.. you are a Maths teacher and Finance and Banking is something er.. little different..

FM: Before I started I thought that both were very similar, but when I started through the course I understood that there are many things in the course that are really different, so I started to study hard and referred to different subjects to enrich my knowledge.

SS: When you say different events, you clearly said that you are a Math teacher and it was the government's encouragement of a study leave, that helped you pursue this course.. do you think the government is very supportive of the Emirati women studying and getting degrees ?

FM: The Emirati government supports both male and female with equal priorities for both of them, giving for all of us. However there are certain special measures to encourage the woman in particular, because they find that she is as you said, it is felt they are not coming to participate.

SS: In terms of influential people, we talked about your husband being a source of encouragement. What about your own family, were they a source of encouragement as well?

FM: My mother does not accept the idea before.. first of all because she says you have your children and how will you manage (yani).. but now, she is supporting me by carrying my children during the studies.

SS: So you feel that the role of the family has changed and they are generally supportive.

FM: Yes, even what I say, after all I am not from the city and I am from the countryside where this idea of going for and completing the education is still not popular, but after me and other woman, all the people and teachers, I gave them the idea that this is good.

SS: What paid jobs have you done so far? And how do you see your career developing from here because of the Master's Degree?

FM: I have been a Mathematics teacher throughout, in terms of career development I want to move away from teaching which is a very hard job to senior positions in the Ministry of Education or into something more management oriented like in financial management.

SS: Okay, let me ask you another question, how did you come into teaching ?

FM: First of all as I said earlier, I am from the countryside, so it's the best job for the woman is teaching, because inside the school, all are females and they don't have another opportunities other than teaching.

When I decided to work, there was no other opportunity, I liked mathematics but I did not like teaching, but when I worked as a teacher I found it enjoyable but hard so I think that I cannot continue as a teacher and I need to do something else.

SS: After you finish maybe in next year, where do you see your career developing ? What kind of jobs do you want to apply for?

FM: In management

SS: And how has your experience been with this Master's Degree, considering you are from the countryside, and also where did you study for your Bachelor's Degree?

FM: Al Ain University, as a hostel student.

SS: What did you do your Bachelor's Degree in?

FM: Science and Math.

SS: So when you finished your Bachelor's Degree, did you really want to go into teaching as a full time job or did you go into it only because it was the only job available?

FM: Yes...Because it was the only one.

SS: So the reason you came into a Master's in Finance and Banking is to move out of the teaching career line and go into something which is more interesting for you.

FM: Yes.

SS: What areas of the MSc are most enjoyable for you and which ones do you find most difficult? And why?

FM: The most enjoyable field is finance, and the parts on how to research, how to make assignments, how to analyze numbers and this is what I find very enjoyable and these skills benefits me even in my life. Even any event in my life I try to analyze it and these analysis skills are what makes it enjoyable.

As regards the part which is most difficult it is EXAMS... I know from my brother who studies in London for example in his university there are no exams. Their grading is depending on assignments only, so I hope next year there is no EXAMS!

SS: Is it due to the pressure?

FM: Not really... but I don't like it. Sometimes you prepare well, you do all the work, but still your grades may not be good, so sometimes having assignments is better.

SS: Please tell me the story of your family background, school and higher education experience, prior to joining BUiD?

FM: As I say I am from the countryside.. so my parents doesn't know even how to read and write, but they encourage me and all my brothers and sisters to study even upto Master's and all my brothers and sisters now have education some in difficult fields such as IT and Engineering. I think their lack of education did not stop them from giving us education.

SS: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

FM: Eleven

SS: And all of them are studying?

FM: Some of them are working and some are studying.

SS: And you are the eldest?

FM: Yes

SS: So when you were growing up, who was that that influenced you into the thought that I want to take this course? Was there anyone to motivate you, someone elder?

FM: There was no person as such, as you know my main motivation for coming into this course was the study leave incentive and this really changed my life.

SS: Your children, how many children do you have?

FM: Five

SS: How many are girls and how many boys?

FM: 4 girls and one boy

SS: How old is the eldest one?

FM: 10 years old

SS: Is she looking at you studying Finance and Banking and saying I want to be like my mother when I grow up?

FM: Not really.. but I want to tell you something, among all my partners in study, most of them are smaller than me and most have just finished their Bachelor's and I think so I am very late in starting my Master's. so my plan is when my children complete their Bachelors, I will encourage them to study higher.

SS: You said you studied in Al Ain University, what type of a school did you study in, was it mixed?

FM: No it was an all-girls school.

SS: When you were applying to university, why did you choose Science and Math?

FM: I was in IT, at that time I was not married and later I found that after marriage, devoting time to lab time, assignments and IT work was tedious. However I was clever and liked mathematics very much, so I changed later. I liked education too, so after my degree I became a teacher.

SS: What do you think are the key factors other than government initiatives that helped Emirati women's careers? The reason that I am asking this question is that over the last

40 years post independence, now we see women slowly coming out and participating in education.

FM: Teachers and professors.

SS: What about the barriers apart from location, travel and children?

FM: The main reason I think is the family aspects.. the other reason is that there is not enough university in each city or Emirate. For Eg in Fujairah, we need to go to Al Ain to get the best education.

SS: Since there are no universities in Fujairah?

FM: Not that, the standards are different. Maybe in Dubai, Sharjah and all the standards are good but the other Emirates have a problem. Apart from this there is also the distance problem associated with coming to university.

SS: So basically its time distance and family, any other barriers like from family?

FM: For me no, but for others maybe.. umm since I have some friends in Al Ain, specially though they have finished university are not allowed to work. We have little families like these whose daughters are educated but not allowed to work.

SS: Why so?

FM: There are only few socially accepted professions for women and also problems of mixed workplace so sometimes they are not allowed.. but only in certain places. Like in the case of my friend who completed a Bachelor's Degree with very high marks five years ago, and after that she had a good opportunity to work in a good company, but her husband did not allow her to work. So she is now at home.

SS: Do you think this is a right thing?

FM: This is not right and the families should give chances to develop.

SS: Do you think the problem is due to the slow spread of education in the countryside?

FM: No no.. the main problem is the families which don't allow.

SS: Do many families still have that stigma that don't go for studying etc?

FM: Not for studying but some rules regarding mixing, covering of the face and many others which restrict her and may make her hate the idea of going for work.

SS: What do you think are the most popular course for your women, those with a science or an Arts background?

FM: I think there is no such thing, if the student is interested, she will go for it.

SS: When you were in school, was there anyone to guide you as to courses and career options ?

FM: No.

SS: Do you think something like this would have been helpful?

FM: Yes. I think counseling is helpful. Also I think involving parents in this will also be extremely helpful.