

**Employers' perceptions and Higher Educational Institutions
initiatives towards UAE Graduate Employability**

تصورات أرباب العمل ومبادرات المعاهد التربوية العليا نحو توظيف الخريجين
الإماراتيين

by

LEISA JANE HASSOCK

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

at

The British University in Dubai

September 2019

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**Thesis Supervisor
Dr Christopher Hill**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study investigates the employability of UAE graduates by i) confirming what initiatives Higher Education Institutions are currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability, ii) determining what initiatives Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve their employability, iii) identifying the main influences for Employers when deciding to employ UAE graduates. The UAE government is focused on developing a knowledge economy as the use of fossil fuels become redundant.

The study used a qualitative approach utilizing in-depth interviews and focus groups with Employers across all UAE industry sectors as well as Higher Education Institutions to identify employer perceptions concerning UAE graduate employment and work readiness.

The findings required graduates to develop soft skills, particularly communication skills together with a stronger work ethic and a focus on lifelong learning.

A mixed-method approach was commenced however the quantitative data portion was abandoned when data from questionnaires became limited. Qualitative data however provided valuable in-depth and constructive responses.

The findings from this study support the development of curriculum planning and strategic decision making as well as strategic economic and workforce planning.

The study identifies employers' perceptions of UAE graduate's employability and the current education processes Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are taking towards work readiness for graduate employability.

Keywords

Employability; UAE; Skills; Communication; HEIs; Lifelong Learning.

نبذة مختصرة

تبحث هذه الدراسة في قابلية توظيف الخريجين الإماراتيين من خلال (1) تحديد العوامل الرئيسية التي تؤثر في صاحب العمل عند اتخاذ القرار بتوظيف الخريجين الإماراتيين، (2) تحديد المبادرات التي يطلب أصحاب العمل من مؤسسات التعليم العالي تنفيذها لتحسين إمكانية توظيف هؤلاء الخريجين، (3) التأكيد على المبادرات التي تنفذها حالياً المؤسسات التعليمية العليا لزيادة إمكانية توظيف الخريجين الإماراتيين. تركز حكومة دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة على تطوير اقتصاد المعرفة خاصة بعد أن أصبح استخدام الوقود الأحفوري يمكن الاستغناء عنه.

استخدمت الدراسة مقارنة نوعية عن طريق المقابلات المتعمقة ومجموعات التركيز مع أصحاب العمل في جميع قطاعات الصناعة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة وكذلك مؤسسات التعليم العالي لتحديد تصورات أصحاب العمل فيما يتعلق بتوظيف الخريجين الإماراتيين واستعدادهم للعمل.

بينت النتائج أنه يتعين على الخريجين تطوير مهارات ناعمة، خاصة مهارات التواصل مع الالتزام بأخلاقيات العمل بشكل أقوى والتركيز على التعلم مدى الحياة.

عند بدأ البحث كانت الطريقة المتبعة هي الطريقة المختلطة ولكن فيما بعد تم استبعاد البيانات الكمية عندما أصبحت البيانات من الاستبيانات محدودة وغير دالة. عوضاً عن ذلك، قد وفرت البيانات النوعية استجابات قيمة وعميقة وبناءة.

تدعو النتائج التي توصلت إليها هذه الدراسة إلى تطوير تخطيط المناهج وتطوير عملية اتخاذ القرارات الاستراتيجية وكذلك تطوير التخطيط الاقتصادي وتخطيط القوى العاملة.

حددت هذه الدراسة تصورات أصحاب العمل حول قابلية توظيف الخريجين الإماراتيين والعمليات التعليمية الحالية التي تنتهجها المؤسسات التعليمية العليا فيما يخص تطوير الاستعداد للعمل من أجل توظيف الخريجين.

الكلمات الرئيسية:

القابلية للتوظيف، الإمارات العربية المتحدة؛ المهارات؛ التواصل؛ مؤسسات التعليم العالي؛ التعلم مدى الحياة.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family.

Thank you to my husband John Hassock who has been patient, supportive and guided my perseverance by providing common-sense practical direction throughout this project. His constant support and encouragement helped me when I felt overwhelmed. Without his love, sacrifice and encouragement this doctorate would not have materialised.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my doctoral supervisor Dr Christopher Hill for his support, leadership and direction throughout the course of this research. Thank you to all the faculty and administration at the British University in Dubai for your diligence and support.

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List of Definitions and /or Abbreviations

AED	United Arab Emirates Dirham
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council, a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.
GDP	Gross domestic product measures the value of economic activity within the country
Government	Entity owned by the government and not traded on the stock Exchange
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEI	Higher Educational Institution
HEIs	Higher Educational Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHRE	Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation
Middle East	a transcontinental region centred on Western Asia, Turkey and Egypt consists of 22 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, The United Arab Emirates and Yemen
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Public	Company whose shares are traded on the Stock Exchange
Private	Company whose shares are not traded on a Stock Exchange
Private	Shares owned by a private individual
UAE	United Arab Emirates
WEF	World Economic Forum
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter I Introduction

Graduate unemployment rates pose a serious problem globally and under-employment amongst university graduates is increasing (Vorotnikov 2019; Jayasingam & Thursasamy 2018; Abdulla Al Ghuraiar Foundation 2018; Anastasiu 2017; Belwal et al. 2017; Momani 2017; WEF 2017; EY 2015; Nawagune 2014; Shierholz et al. 2013) whilst Arab youth are ill-prepared for the current working world and the future needs of employers (Bayt & YouGov 2016; Islamic Development Bank 2011; e4e 2011). In the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) region University graduates constitute 40% of the total unemployed (Devarajan 2016) in comparison to the OECD average level of graduate unemployment of 4.1% (OECD 2018).

This study seeks to investigate what influences an employer to hire a United Arab Emirate (UAE) graduate and what improvements the employer suggests could be undertaken by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to improve the employability of UAE graduates. This researcher initially implemented a convergent parallel mixed method study using both quantitative and qualitative data to build a comprehensive investigation into the research problem of UAE graduate employability (Creswell, 2014). Although as the study developed it became a purely qualitative study based on interview and focus group data due to lack of response from employers in the qualitative surveys. The study required the participation of employers across all twelve (12) UAE industry sectors, staff from HEIs and UAE alumni.

This chapter commences with an overview of the context and background that provides structure to the study. This is followed by the problem statement, the statement of purpose, the associated research questions and the research approach. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion on the

rationale and significance of this research to the UAE as well as definitions of some key terminology used in the study.

Background and Context

Graduate employability is an important issue worldwide. Internationally, employer's state that when recruiting graduates they require the following abilities such as a positive attitude (72%), relevant work experience (54%), the ability of the graduate to manage themselves, be effective team players, have basic numeric & written communication, customer service skills, the ability to analyse problems and produce solutions (CBI 2009). Globally, employers state that a degree is not enough to be employable, the graduate must have the ability to cope with challenges in the workplace and have business awareness (GCU 2018). Bakhshi et al. (2017) emphasise that interpersonal skills, higher-order cognitive skills and systems skills constitute future trend requirements in the UK and US. Although Clark et al. (2014) and Montt (2015) suggest that workers possessing skills at a higher level than those required for a job may be overlooked. OECD (2016) advises that skills mismatch and shortages are common in advanced economies however whilst policy intervention can address the mismatch reliable information is required regarding the future skill requirements if this is to be addressed successfully. This study, undertaken within the United Arab Emirates, specifically relates to what Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are currently undertaking to improve UAE graduate employability, what employers perceive HEIs could implement to improve UAE graduates employability and what influences employers when making their decision to hire UAE graduates.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven Emirates, comprised of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain. The UAE achieved independence from Britain in 1971. The UAE economy was initially supported by the pearling industry however in the late 1960s this was replaced by fossil fuels when they became the main export for the country. In 1971, Sheikh Zayed Bin-Sultan Al Nahyan established the UAE federation which is one of the most socially liberal countries in the Gulf with a broad tolerance of all religions and cultures. However, politically it is an authoritarian state governed by a President elected by the UAE Federal Council every five years. The UAE has a blended legal system of Islamic law and civil law; a population of 9.7 million (July 2018 est.) and population growth of 1.44% (2018 est.) in an area of 83,600 sq. kilometres (CIA 2019).

Immigrants with residential work visas contribute 88% of the total population (UN 2017), the official language is Arabic whilst English is widely spoken and understood. The dominant religion is Islam whilst 85% of the population is heavily concentrated in the three largest emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The current GDP per capita is USD 43,493 (World Bank 2018), considerably above the world average GDP of USD 17,300 (World Bank 2017). The UAE has an open economy with a high per capita income by international standards largely financed by oil and gas (30%) exports. Recently, the strategic focus has shifted away from oil & gas towards economic diversification and the promotion of the UAE as a global trade and tourism hub as well as developing industry and creating more jobs for nationals through education and increased private sector employment (CIA 2019).

UAE Vision 2021 states that by 2021 the UAE will benefit from a sustainable and diversified economy, having adopted new economic models whilst capitalising on global economic partnerships to guarantee long-term prosperity for current and future generations of Emiratis (UAE Vision 2021 2018). The vision includes harnessing the full potential of its human capital by maximising the participation of Emiratis in the workforce, encouraging entrepreneurship, nurturing home-grown public and private sector leaders whilst also attracting and retaining the best international talent. The Vision provides for all Emiratis to undertake higher education and to enrich their minds with the skills that the nation requires to fuel its knowledge economy. It is the objective of universities to accommodate the needs of Emiratis and their future employers and to tailor the curriculum to the demands of the workplace (UAE Vision 2021 2018).

Emiratis are expected to join the world of work, become leaders of industry and self-motivated entrepreneurs, arranging the countries resources whilst bringing innovative products to the marketplace and learning from global expertise (UAE Vision 2021 2018). Additionally, the UAE will continue to attract and retain the finest and most productive international workers and entrepreneurs by offering them fulfilling employment and an attractive place to live (Government.ae 2019b). Currently, the UAE has the world's largest migration rate with expatriates comprising 88.5% of the 9.7 million population and Emiratis 11.5% of this population. In 2017, 83.7% of expatriates were employed whilst only 47.6% Emiratis were employed (Federal Competitiveness & Statistics Authority 2018). The UAE government aims to address this imbalance.

Major Infrastructure Spending

The UAE has a strategic location between Asia, Europe, and Africa with strong financial reserves and a large sovereign wealth fund of USD 792 billion (Government.ae 2019b). Currently, the UAE is implementing significant infrastructure spending to stimulate the economy and boost the number of jobs for both Emiratis and expatriates. Dubai is hosting Expo 2020, an international mega-event, with an investment of AED 40.1 billion in infrastructure and other assets. It is expected to attract 25 million visitors with 190 countries participating. Expo 2020 is reported to contribute AED 122.6 billion gross value to the UAE economy during the period 2013-31 and over 905,200 full-time jobs (EY. 2019).

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces also approved an AED 50 Billion economic stimulus program for Abu Dhabi on 6 June 2018 (PwC 2018). Additionally, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Executive Council, approved initiatives during June 2018 towards further stimulating economic growth and reducing the cost of doing business in Dubai. These developments continue to show the UAE government's focus on encouraging, growing, and easing the way of doing business and stimulating the local economy as quickly as possible (PwC 2018).

Visa Initiatives

The UAE is diversifying its economy, building competitive advantages and generating employment growth (UAE Vision 2018). In the past, expatriates could only reside in the UAE if they held a working residential visa or had an Emirati partner sponsor their business, then they

could bring their family to live with them while they held a valid visa. In 2018, the Government introduced many significant legislation changes increasing access to residential visas in selected occupations from 2-3 years to 5-10 years. One recent change, in particular, affects graduates from HEIs. Graduates who have a distinction GPA of at least 3.65 upon graduation, can apply for a five (5) year residential visa. These changes have prompted graduates studying at prestigious universities to consider remaining in the UAE for employment, 49% of New York University Abu Dhabi 2018 graduates remain in the Emirates after graduation, working for high profile organisations such as the Central Bank, Emaar and Etihad (Rizvi 2019). The employment market has become considerably more competitive as international and local UAE graduates compete for UAE jobs (Hellyer 2018). These recent visa initiatives have been designed to stimulate the economy and generate additional positions.

UAE Growth Expectations

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects growth in the UAE to exceed 2% in 2019 and to approach 3% during 2020-21. Contrary to IMF predictions, the World Bank estimates economic growth in the UAE to be 2.6% in 2019, 3% in 2020 and 3.2% in 2021 (World Bank 2019). This growth has been through corporate consolidation and structural reforms, including large government-related entities and commercial bank mergers. Employment and tourist arrivals are increasing as the UAE economy continues to proceed with its diversification strategies. The IMF recommends reducing the footprint of the public sector whilst continuing to strengthen the enabling environment for Small to Medium Enterprises and continuing to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI). It also recommended modernising the labour market by encouraging the employment of more nationals in the private sector whilst continuing to attract and retain expatriate

talent. The UAE has strengthened its financial markets by adopting federal debt law, moving to the Basel III and adopting International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) (IMF 2019).

Additionally, the IMF recommends improving the sharing of policy coordination and transparency between the Federal and Emirate-level authorities as well as sharing information on policymaking with the public to boost consumer and business confidence while it works towards fulfilling its aspirations of becoming one of the world's leading nations (IMF 2019).

Diversification towards a Future Knowledge Industry

The World Economic Forum (2014) recommended investments in reforming education in the GCC region, upskilling and reskilling large sectors of the population and preparing labour policy changes that addresses job creation, including supporting entrepreneurship. In the UAE vision 2021, these proposals have been included to facilitate the development of a knowledge-based economy by developing the educated and qualified workforce to drive economic development in the UAE (UAE Vision 2021 2018). Dashiti, (2017) suggests privatisation of government assets (including utilities, transportation service, oil and gas-related activities, infrastructure, health, and education towards public-private partnership (PPP) projects would attract both local investment and foreign direct investment. Dashiti (2017) also recommends that the government become a facilitator, regulator, enabler, and driver of business. Ernst & Young (2015) also suggested that the government mandate and promote educational initiatives with clear strategy, provide incentives to the private sector to get more involved through apprenticeships and graduate training schemes, equalise public sector pay with private sector benchmarks, promote young people being employed in the private sector and promote and support entrepreneurship and the establishment of businesses,

all of which the government is embracing through the economic stimulus package and initiatives described earlier in this section.

The World Economic Fund (2014), in their ‘Rethinking Arab Employment’ report, suggested strategies such as increasing flexibility in the legislative and regulatory framework whilst harmonizing the labour laws between nationals and non-nationals, making education more relevant to the labour market. It also suggested increasing early exposure of students to the labour market, improving career guidance, developing well-functioning job matching institutions and information systems and finally, increasing social recognition and financial reward for vocational training and related jobs.

Unemployment

Sabry & Zaman (2013) state that 14% of young Emiratis are unemployed. Cordesman (2002) & Harry (2007) suggest these figures indicate the urgency of employment creation for UAE citizens. More recently Ernst & Young (2016) advised that high youth unemployment could lead to political, economic and social instability if remedial action is not implemented.

Unemployment for graduates is a global issue and of significant focus in all countries. Comprehensive research has indicated that there are several factors that affect graduate unemployment, such as social class, gender and ethnicity (HEFCE 2015), where the graduate lives, access to transport, quality of career advice (Harvey 2001), the family lifestyle (Hakim 2002) and personal values (Brown & Crace 1999) being a few of the influencing factors. Other factors include the actual number and types of jobs available for the graduates; during a global recession job opportunities will be reduced. Globally, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is suggesting

a growth slowdown and a precarious recession (IMF 2019). They also suggest that this is due to trade policy issues, China's growth decline, significant disruptions to the global supply chain, the risks arising from Brexit, and substantial private and public sector debt. Another major unemployment factor is the increasing number of students entering higher education which has increased competition (Helyer & Lee 2014). Further in this study, the socio-economic context of graduates will be considered (Wilton 2014) however at this juncture the focus remains on current percentage unemployment and possible specific local reasons for unemployment within the Gulf Cooperative Council Nations (GCC), Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and UAE. There is a lack of specific research and accessible data regarding unemployment in the UAE.

Most of the graduates from tertiary institutions in the UAE are Emirati however this is changing due to the large number of private universities within the country. Further details regarding the providers of higher education are discussed in chapter II. The World Economic Forum (2017) suggests that youth unemployment in the MENA regions is as high as 31% with university graduates making up 30% of the total unemployed pool. Youths under the age of 25 constitute nearly half of the MENA population and more than a quarter of them are unemployed (WEF 2017).

The Arab Labour Organization cautions that high unemployment rates signify a widening gap between university curriculum and the needs of employers (EY. 2015). The UAE has unique demographics and this has an impact on the employability of the UAE graduates. Over 60% of the UAE's population is under the age of 29 and almost half those (i.e. 30%) of the population are under 15 ensuring that youth education and employment will remain one of the primary policy objectives for the UAE government now and for future decades (UNDP 2016). WEF (2014) suggested that youth unemployment in the UAE is around 11% however this appears

to be low when compared with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain who have figures over 27% and Oman with 20% youth unemployment. Sabry and Zaman (2013) suggest Emirati unemployment is higher at 14% however it is important to note that the majority of unemployed are women (WEF 2014). Female participation in the workplace among Emiratis is currently 31% (SCAD 2015) however the government is focused on increasing the participation of national Emirati women in the workforce over the next few years (UAE Vision 2021 2018). It is estimated that the participation of women in the workforce will increase the UAE GDP economy by 12% (WEF 2017). In relation to education, the UAE is the first among Arab countries in educating its female citizens (Hausmann et al 2012) however Arab women live in a family-based, patriarchal, Islamic society where the gender-roles are clearly defined and family relationships are emphasised (Gallant and Pounder 2008). Many UAE families adhere to gender segregation with most federally sponsored HEIs also being segregated by gender. The challenge for Emirati women is that cultural factors affect the work choices available to them (Metcalf 2011).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and the labour market need to better understand the employer's requirements whilst meeting those needs by ensuring that the graduates have the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to undertake the positions on offer (Al Harthi 2011). There is a need for employers and training institutions to engage in regular interactions to develop, adjust and reform educational strategies towards meeting industry needs for relevant future skills (Jarrar 2018).

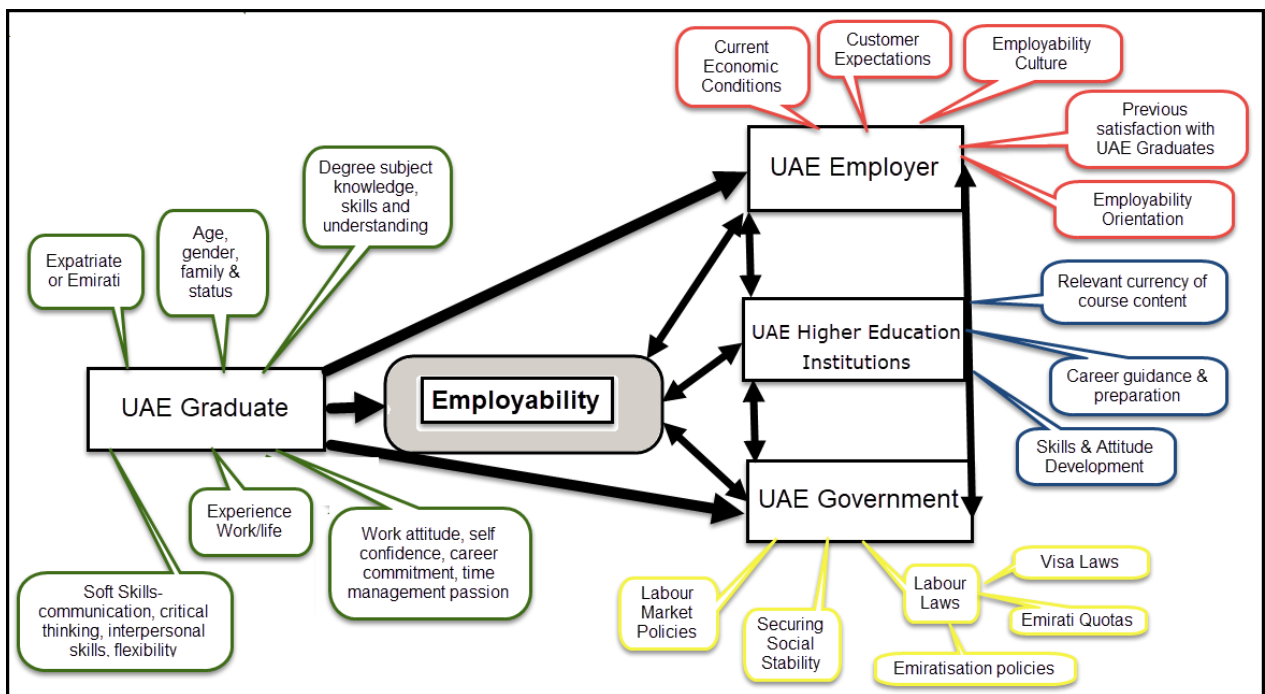
Problem

Many studies have been conducted globally with the students, graduates and Higher Education Institutions and their perceptions of what makes a graduate employable, but an inconsequential amount of research has been undertaken on what employers perceive makes graduates employable (Chhinzer & Russo 2018). This study focusses on the employers' perceptions with respect to UAE graduate employability and the influences that impact the employers' decision. Currently, there is a deficiency of information as to which attributes motivate employers to engage UAE graduates and what influences their decision.

UAE graduates have unique features in comparison to MENA graduates as they are made up of both national citizens (Emiratis) and expatriate students who may be working whilst they study in the UAE or reside in the UAE specifically to study. The UAE has a much healthier employment picture, when compared to the high youth unemployment in the rest of the MENA region, with an increasing number of local jobs being created for UAE youth (Jarrar 2018). UAE graduates have access to over 100 HEIs affiliated to universities across the world offering many different programs (KHDA 2014). Jose & Chacko (2017) advise security concerns and political insecurity across the MENA region has made the UAE an attractive destination for MENA students. Additionally, UAE expatriate graduates can remain in the UAE on special residential visas and apply for work provided they achieve outstanding academic results (Rizvi 2019). The UAE, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are leaders in the provision of high-skilled employment in the MENA region (WEF 2017). The UAE's energy efficiency sector is projected to create more than 65,000 jobs by 2030 and the UAE's Green Growth Strategy is expected to create a further 160,000 new jobs by 2030 (D'Amato 2015).

Once HEIs understand what influences and affects the employer’s perceptions of employability, HEIs can develop appropriate strategies to improve their graduate’s employability (Cai 2013). The context of this study is unique as the variables that affect the problem are unique to the country. The theoretical framework displayed in Figure 1: UAE Graduate Employability Framework has been adopted for the dynamic context and evolved from many global employability models which are explained in Chapter 2.

Figure 1: UAE Graduate Employability Framework (Hassock 2019)



The existing models and theories that guided the development of the UAE Graduate Employability Framework were Knight & York (2004) USEM Model of Employability, the Pool & Sewell (2007) CareerEDGE model, Guilbert et al (2015) Employability & its links with other Constructs and the WEF 2014 Dynamics & Vulnerabilities of Employment System in GCC countries – An integrated framework. The context and nature of the UAE is very different due to the dynamic nature of the

environment, the current and expected influx of UAE Graduates into the employment market, the dynamic changes in the Emiratisation policies, labour law and government decrees and the economy. Employability is central in the framework surrounded by the main actors in the process being the UAE Employer, HEIs, UAE Government and the UAE Graduate. The UAE Graduate Employability Framework will guide the enquiry.

This study aims to collect data to assist with a better understanding of the UAE graduate's employability situation whilst also seeking to work towards solutions and recommendations to resolve deficiencies in the current education process that become evident during the study. The objective is to better understand how employers perceive the UAE graduate's readiness for employability, what UAE graduates require, and what HEIs need to do to increase the employability prospects of graduates.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the employability status of UAE graduates from the perspective of UAE employers. Gaining an understanding of the employer's view on the work readiness of the current UAE graduate will influence the strategies HEIs undertake to improve UAE graduate employability. This study will investigate the primary factors an employer considers when making the decision to employ UAE graduates and whether employers perceive graduates to be adequately prepared and work-ready. It will focus on what current and future skills and work-readiness abilities employers perceive to be most important to ensure the graduate is employable. Additionally, it will investigate what strategies employers recommend HEIs implement to improve graduate employability and what initiatives HEIs are currently undertaking to improve graduate employability.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study will be achieved by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?

RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates?

RQ3. What are the main influences for Employer's when deciding to employ UAE graduates?

Research Design overview

This section provides an overview of the research design however comprehensive details regarding the methodology can be found in Chapter III. The study employed a pragmatic philosophical approach to investigate the research problem. The research questions guided the inquiry (Leavy 2017). This study was conceived as a convergent parallel mixed method design using quantitative and qualitative data to build a comprehensive investigation of the research problem (Creswell 2014). Although the study commenced as a mixed-method study it evolved into a purely qualitative study, due to the lack of survey responses. Multiple methods of data collection were considered to facilitate validation of the information whilst obtaining an in-depth understanding of the research problem. The conceptual framework developed from the literature review guided the data analysis, interpretation and phases of the research.

The objective was to conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups concurrently with a survey of 500 respondents. The survey process was piloted, and all phases implemented, however, the low level of response from the participants surveyed necessitated a modification in the direction of the

study where the obtaining of data relied solely on qualitative research. The number of in-depth interviews and focus groups was increased to compensate for the loss of survey data and to ensure corroboration of information. The qualitative research was pursued until saturation of data occurred (Acharya et al. 2013; Fusch & Ness 2015). The data collected was rich in-depth and provided wide-ranging information on the research topic.

The sample method chosen for employers' interviews was stratified sampling whilst characteristics that influenced the sampling were based on achieving an even representation across twelve (12) UAE Industry sectors, representation across all the locations the enterprises operated in and representation across all different forms of ownership. Convenience sampling was utilised for HEI interviews and focus groups with the objective of having as many different HEIs represented in the study as possible.

The interviews were semi-structured, the length was dependent upon the interviewee and the context (Gubrium & Holstein 2009) with the interview usually lasting between 60 minutes to 90 minutes. All interview and focus group participants signed a consent form and were allocated a code to ensure confidentiality of both their identity and that of the enterprise. All participants were ensured in writing of anonymity and confidentiality. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The focus groups usually lasted 60 minutes although it depended on the richness of the contribution from the participants.

Once the interview and focus groups were completed an inductive qualitative approach was taken to generate codes and themes during the analysis (Adu 2019). The approach was based on Adu (2019) step by step guide of coding, categorizing, connecting and then communicating, using

NVivo12 software. This process was ongoing until all forty-one interviews and six focus groups had been analysed with the iterative process of coding and thematic analysis being conducted in parallel with that of data collection. Themes and sub-themes were discovered, compared and contrasted, and correlated to the research and the literature review. The information was then verified and checked for consistency, working towards reducing any biases (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008).

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study necessitated an investigation into what employers perceive to be most important considerations when making decisions to employ UAE graduates. HEIs need to ensure that they develop effective strategies to improve the employability of their graduates however, to undertake this effectively they need to be aware of all of the areas requiring further development. The matter of increasing employability for all UAE graduates is an immediate challenge that requires careful planning and a focused strategy on behalf of all stakeholders including government, UAE society, employers, educational institutions, employees, families and students. The approach undertaken by this research included the provision of a holistic and empirical understanding of the employer's perceptions of employability by reviewing qualitative indicators of employment from the employer's perspective. This study will provide data that can be used to not only improve the employability of UAE graduates thereby enhancing the individual's economic condition but also ensuring that the UAE youth of the future are better prepared for employment.

This research is significant as the theoretical perspective is guided by the UAE Graduate Employability Framework and focuses on the stratified sampling of interviews with employers

across all twelve (12) UAE industry sectors. It also identifies employer's perceptions of UAE graduates' employability and the relevance of current education processes implemented by HEIs when preparing UAE graduates for employment. The study is unique as it focuses on both the UAE context as well as the employer's perceptions of what determines a UAE graduate's employability. The study not only collects data from the HEIs to confirm which initiatives they are currently implementing to improve graduate employability but also asks the employer what they perceive will further enhance graduate employability as well as what initiatives HEIs should undertake to improve graduate employability. The study incorporates feedback from employers and their perceptions of what will improve the preparation of the UAE Graduates for employment in the UAE. The research collects information across 10 different HEIs to confirm which initiatives they are currently undertaking to improve graduate employability. The study uses the combined research data to make further recommendations to improve graduate employability. The data from this study will not only be used to inform UAE HEI curriculum design but also provide information on gaps in the education process whilst providing data to direct future policy on employability. The data collected in this study will support the development of curriculum planning and strategic decision-making.

The Researcher

During this study, the researcher was a faculty member, teacher and academic advisor in the business division in a UAE Higher Education Institution whilst undertaking this research. The researcher brings knowledge and understanding of the current environmental context to the study having worked in higher education institutions within the UAE for the past twelve years.

Whilst this experience provides insight into academic processes and procedures the researcher has ensured that it does not influence their judgement regarding research design, analysis or conclusions. In addition to this, the researcher remained faithful to engaging in self-reflection by keeping a journal, consulting with their doctoral supervisor and other qualified researchers. To address the subjectivity and strengthen the credibility of the research the researcher approached the study using corroboration of all data sources, methods and reliability checks with other researchers.

Definitions

Definitions or terminology central to this study are listed below to ensure correct understanding however further definitions and abbreviations are included in Section VI of this study.

Emirati: An Emirati is a national of the United Arab Emirates (McDermott & Neault 2011).

Employer: has the authority to act on behalf of the enterprise to hire and dismiss persons in ‘paid employment’ of the same organisation (OECD 2019).

Employability: the ability to gain and retain fulfilling work (Hillage & Pollard 1998).

Graduate: a person of any nationality who has completed all courses and passed a degree at any higher education institution.

HEIs: Higher Education Institutions.

Stakeholder: an organisation, establishment, body, agency or individuals with a recognised interest in the UAE and/or is affected by the UAE, such as education and training providers, industry representatives and professional groups, Government, quasi-Government, regulators, employers,

employees/workers/volunteers, education and training practitioners and professionals, learners and the community (NQA 2012).

UAE: United Arab Emirates.

UAE Graduate: a person of any nationality who has completed all courses and passed a degree at any UAE higher education institution.

Structure

This study commences with Chapter I which introduces the research problem, purpose statement and research questions. Chapter II considers a review of the body of literature that addresses all aspects of the research questions whilst also discussing the conceptual framework. Chapter III discusses the research methodology by explaining the research worldview, the design, the population, the participants, the method of sampling, the method of data collection, the methods of data analysis & synthesis, the ethics processes and limitations of the research. Chapter IV presents the results and analysis of the research information gathered across the in-depth interviews and focus groups. The final chapter, Chapter V discusses the findings, conclusions and recommendations found in this study. The conclusions have been guided by the research questions whilst the findings addressed the three areas (a) what initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability? (b) what initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates, (c) what are the main influences for Employer's when deciding to employ UAE graduates? The chapter includes a discussion of the major findings and conclusions established by this research. The discussion is followed by the research recommendations as well as a final

reflection on this study. The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to all stakeholders as to how best to improve the employability of UAE graduates.

Chapter II Literature Review

Introduction & Overview

This chapter discusses the literature related to the employability of national and expatriate graduates from tertiary education institutions in the UAE and the relevance of this analysis to the future development of the UAE. The study deliberates on the approaches government and higher education authorities are taking to foster the development of human capital and its relationship to the economic growth of the UAE. Using global literature and research the study defines employability and the general perception of the graduates' abilities, attitudes and technical skills related to employability and the employer's perception of the subject. Also, it investigates past international research concerning the perception employers have regarding the employability of graduates and the initiatives Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are implementing towards improving graduate employability globally.

The chapter discusses initiatives taken by international governments, employers, the community, and the management of higher education institutions towards improving the employability of higher education graduates. It investigates the impact of the fourth industrial revolution and its effects on future employability. The study examines projected jobs of the future and the skills required to successfully fill those positions. It also looks at the actions international agencies are taking towards graduate development. The study also focuses on the specific approaches the UAE is adopting towards initiatives aimed at improving the employability of the higher education graduates.

The literature addresses previous studies and research on employability, what research has been previously undertaken regarding the influences upon an employer when deciding to employ a UAE

graduate, what past research has been conducted on the specific skills, and the most relevant work-readiness competencies required by an employer. The research will examine what employers believe educational institutions should action towards improving the employability of tertiary education graduates whilst also looking at what higher education institutions have undertaken towards improving UAE graduate employability.

Employability Definition

Employability is a broad topic that has become increasingly important to the UAE. The duality of employability which includes “positional conflict theory” results in a changing relationship between education, employment, the economy, and the labour market (Brown et al. 2003). People may be “employable” but fail to secure a suitable job because of market congestion caused by the realities of work in a knowledge-driven economy. Governments are finding this hard to control and ascertain as the economy and market conditions change. Therefore, to ensure an individual is employable and continues to be relevant to the market place the individual needs to understand labour market conditions and ensure they possess the required skills, knowledge and technical experiences to ensure they have a competitive advantage and remain relevant to the current market conditions. It is possible to be employable but not to be in employment due to “positional conflict theory” of the graduate (Brown et al. 2003).

Employability is more complicated than simply having the “core” or “key” skills. It connects to a range of facets. Although, when an organisation depends on the knowledge and skills of the workforce, the power rests with those that have the knowledge and skills that organisations require (Micheals et al. 2001). It also depends on supply and demand within the job market. Guilbert et

al. (2016) define employability as corresponding with the possibility of accessing a suitable job or remaining employed which results from dynamic and evolving interactions.

It is broadly defined as “the capability to move self-sufficiently with the labour market to release potential through sustainable employment” (Hillage and Pollard 1998, p.12). Hillage & Pollard (1998) associate it with knowledge, skills and attitudes to provide opportunities and job prospects whereas Van Dam (2004) and Veld et al. (2015) focus on job satisfaction, career success and being able to adapt to a new situation, being flexible and having a competitive advantage. Each of these definitions ignores the fact that the labour market and the economic conditions will dictate whether or not the individual will be employed (Brown et al. 2003).

Guilbert et al. (2016) proposes that a new definition of employability is essential due to the complexity of the situation, they also suggest employability is the possibility to access a suitable job, to remain in employment despite the dynamic and evolving interactions between government, educational, organizational strategies, the individual’s characteristics and the social, economic, cultural and technological context. Although researchers agree that employability not only relates to employment but also an amalgamation of achievement of skills, knowledge, personal attributes and understanding, these all make the graduate more able to gain and remain in work (EACEA. 2015; Mason, Williams & Cranmer 2009). Cole & Tibby (2013) agree with employability skills relating to ‘skills for life’ as they not only refer to achieving a job but keeping the position. Whereas Mason, Williams & Cranmer (2009) argue that employability is usually understood as being ‘work ready’. Therefore, it does not only involve having skills but also the possession of knowledge and the ability to have a commercial understanding to make productive contributions in the workplace.

The Singapore Work and Development agency (Sung 2013) suggests the goal of employability is to move from being unemployed to being employed then being able to move up to a more responsible or higher-paid position or to move between positions within the same industry or to another industry, which provides career advancement opportunities. Cole & Tibby (2013); Knight & York (2003) and QAA (2018) suggest that employability also relates to its societal and economic contribution to the range of stakeholders involved. Employability is shaped by many factors, but education is a significant determinant of employability (Lee 2001), although education has to prepare learners for jobs that do not yet exist, technologies yet to be invented and developing problem-solving skills for problems yet to be envisaged (QAA. 2018).

For this research, a UAE graduate is defined as any student who studied at any Higher Education Institution (HEI) located within the UAE and completed a bachelor's degree in any major. The theoretical definition of employability will be kept simple as "the ability to gain and retain fulfilling work" (Hillage & Pollard 1998) although the research will continue to focus on the complexity of employability and the evolving interactions between government, educational, organizational strategies, the individuals characteristics and the social, economic, cultural and technological context (Guilbert et al. 2016).

Employability Models and Theories

The Human Capital Theory developed in the 1960s focuses on the relationship between an individual's education and their earnings or potential earnings in the labour market (Becker 1964). Rumberger (1994) advises that the theory is based on competency, ability, skills and knowledge. Bills (2003) maintains that the Human Capital Theory needs to move from an economic basis to include historical, geographical, cultural and socio-psychological factors. Control theory

advocates, however, that schools prepare students to fill a position in a capitalist hierarchy and incorporate credentialist theory (Belwqal, Priyardarshi & Al Fazari 2017).

The Skill Under-utilisation Theory refers to the individual having involuntary-reduced employment due to their inability to find a job that is proportionate to their qualifications. This has become common for immigrants who move to Western countries (Qureshi, Varghese & Osella 2013) as well as Spain and India. The Skill Under-utilisation and the Human Capital Theories refer to the individual investing their time to achieve a qualification and their expectation that they should be able to gain a position that relates to their qualification in the labour market.

Whereas the Labour Market Segmentation Theory identifies vital reasons why the Human Capital Theory and Skill Under-utilisation theories are not the only factors in an individual gaining the position for which they are qualified in the labour market. The Labour Market Segmentation Theory, sometimes referred to as the Dual Labour Market Theory discusses institutional aspects of race and gender and divides the economy into primary and secondary sectors. The Labour Market Segmentation Theory is the result of an ongoing historical process driven by political-economic forces (Reich, Gordon & Edwards 1973) and is not dissimilar to the situation that has arisen in the UAE.

The UAE required rapid expansion and did not have the labour force available to facilitate the growth and so felt compelled to employ qualified, experienced expatriates. Foster & Barnestson (2017) advise that the political and economic contexts have produced a situation where employers implement expedient employment practices concerning hiring, wages, security and work conditions, to satisfy market requirements and the immediacy of the case. It is a relevant

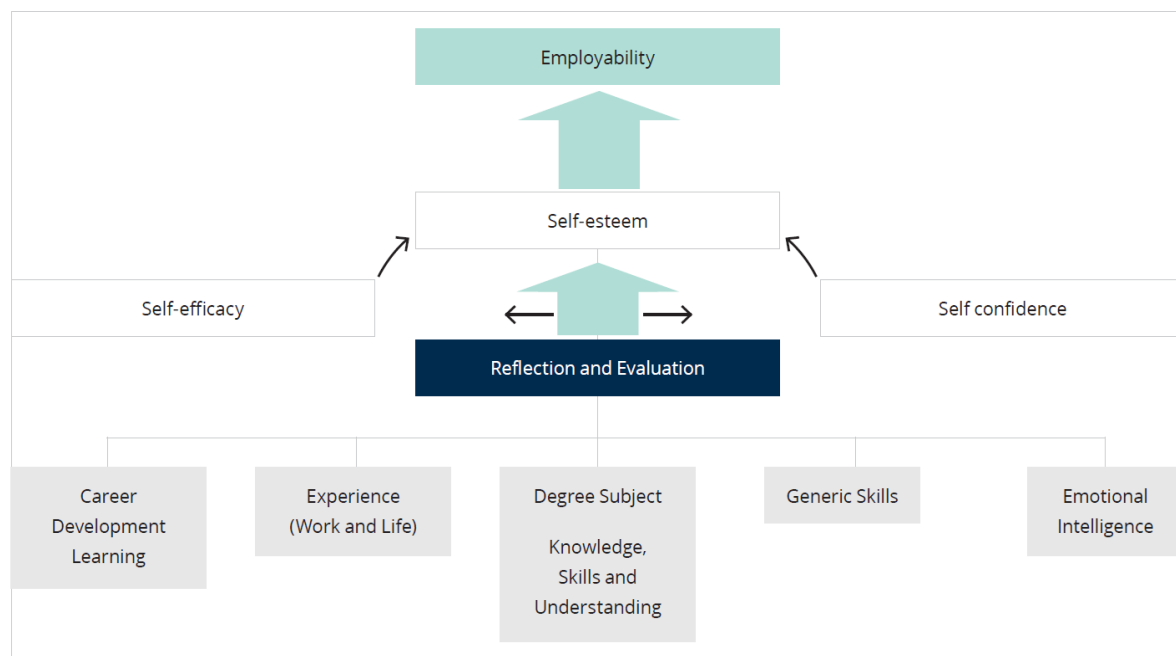
description of the dynamics of capitalist economies. The UAE can source labour from other countries who are willing to do the job and accept the conditions offered. This creates an imbalance for locals in the country who cannot gain employment because expatriates can be sourced from other countries who will undertake the work while accepting cheaper conditions, do not require training and can be released quickly when no longer needed. Initially, these theories relate to the economic ostracism of ethnic subgroups in lower classes, including women, although it could refer to a subgroup within one's own country that is negatively affected. Due to globalisation and immigration challenges, this has become a problem in several countries, Canada (Foster & Barnestson 2017), China (Qi & Liang 2016), Korea (Hyun 2014), and Austria (Herzog-Punzenberger 2003). These theories suggest that government and industry need to adopt a comprehensive approach to addressing these issues (Foster & Barnestson 2017).

The primary market is the high wage-paying jobs with privileged secure positions which usually requires a formal education; however, the secondary sector is the low wage unskilled sector. Thompson & Wissink (2016) suggest that the UAE labour market is segmented into a two-tiered approach comprised of expatriates and locals. There are different labour laws for both tiers, as well as restricted mobility, different pay and conditions while the levels are segmented by nationality, ethnicity and occupation. The labour laws for non-nationals are stricter and mainly designed for the transitory expatriate workforce in the private sector (Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner 2012). The Labour Market Segmentation Theory suggests that employers are the crucial factor in the decision as to whether the individual gains or continues in employment (Gordon, Edwards & Reich 1982).

Pool & Sewell (2007) developed the CareerEDGE model that suggests employability is a combination of career development learning, work and life experience, degree subject knowledge with subsections of understanding and skills, generic skills, emotional intelligence combined with self-reflection and evaluation.

Figure 2: CareerEDGE model (Pool & Sewell 2007, p. 280)

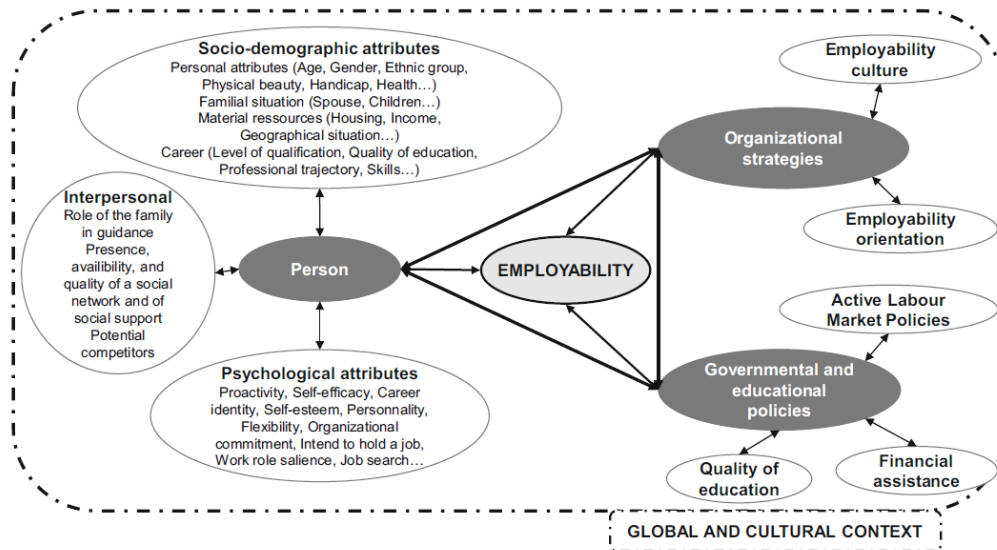
CareerEDGE model



Whereas Knight & York (2004) in their USEM model of employability focussed on the graduate displaying subject understanding, having broad employability effectiveness, displaying required skills within the context of the workplace, effective meta-cognition and personal qualities including self-theories and efficacy beliefs. Guilbert et al. (2016) concentrated on employability from the perspective of accessing a suitable job, remaining employed in a social, economic, cultural and technological context resulting from interactions between the individual, organisational strategies,

government and educational policies. Therefore, the perspective of employability ranges from a macro vision centred on society to the micro vision centred on the individual together with the fact that the whole process is dynamic.

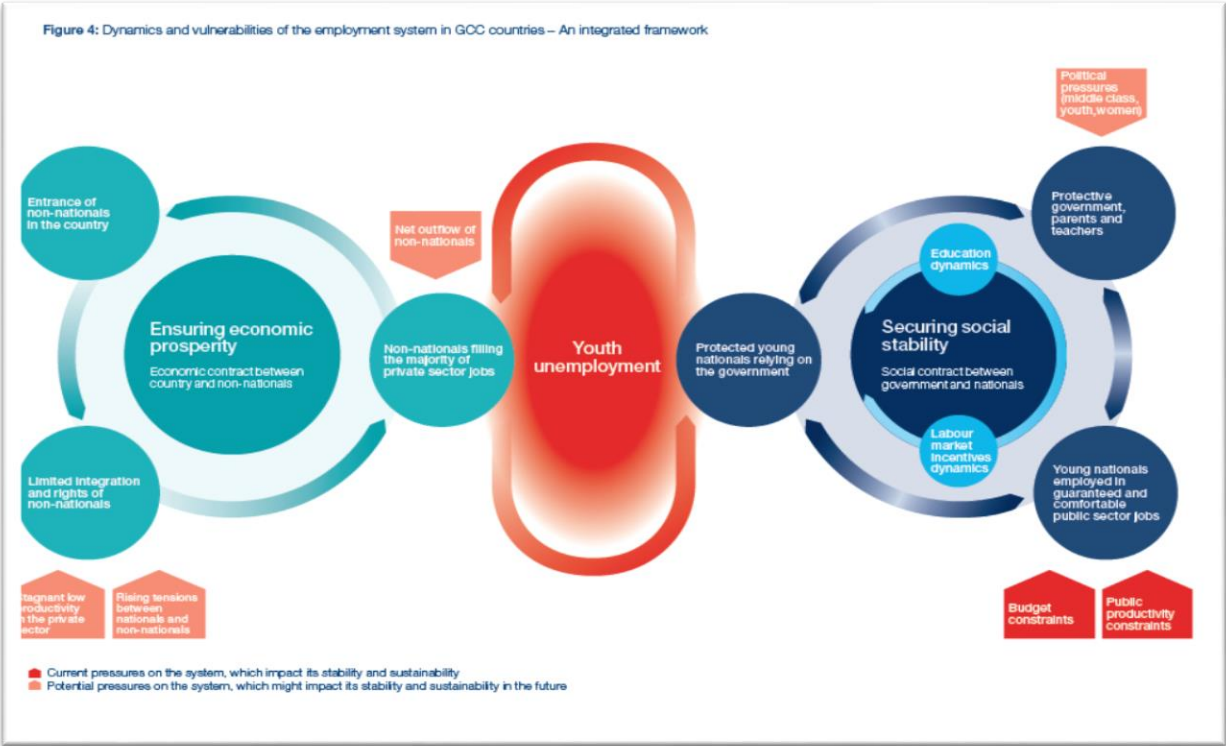
Figure 3: Employability & its links with other constructs (Guilbert 2016, p. 80)



The “duality of employability” also includes “positional conflict theory” as a way of conceptualising the changing relationship between education, employment, and the labour market (Brown et al. 2003). In 2014 the World Economic Forum (2014) met with business leaders, government, civilians and academia between August 2014 and January 2014 resolute on investigating the complex multitude of converging factors that relate to GCC youth unemployment. The stakeholders perceived the main causes of youth unemployment are due to the protective relationship between the government and its citizens, young people’s reluctance to take on specific responsibilities, cultural resistances to certain jobs, rigid labour laws for nationals and private sector not investing enough in the national youth. Additionally, they suggested that non-conducive business environment for entrepreneurship and Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs), lack of

private sector consultation in public decision-making, skills mismatch and lack of diversification due to education dynamics and the employment incentives in the public sector also contributed to youth unemployment. One stakeholder maintained that the public sector pays 30% more than the private sector and provides a secure job; it attracts national talent because it is seen as prestigious, offers comfortable working conditions and a generous salary package (WEF 2014). The WEF (2014) suggested an integrated framework was required to see the "big picture" and create a holistic understanding of the GCC unemployment system.

Figure 4: Dynamics & vulnerabilities of employment system in GCC countries – An integrated framework (WEF 2014, p. 14)



The framework consolidates the stakeholder’s perceptions of the leading causes of GCC youth unemployment and is relevant to the UAE market. The employment system has actors taking part in the labour market – labour supply and labour demand as well as the intermediaries between

supply and demand. Those intermediaries are comprised of parents, teachers, and political leaders. The employment system also includes the institutions' rules and norms which govern the individual's behaviours. The primary purpose of the employment system in the GCC is to secure social stability and ensure economic prosperity.

The vulnerabilities of the GCC employment system relate to the education dynamic and labour market incentives dynamic which leads young people to accept protective authority and closes the circle of social stability. The economic prosperity dynamic is another vulnerability as it refers to the private sector of employing skilled and unskilled non-nationals, as they are cheaper to hire. Additionally, laws control their movement between jobs, and they have temporary residence linked to their jobs, which makes them more attractive to hire, as they are flexible and can be hired and fired as required. The private sector's competitiveness has been based on the non-national workforce. The two separate labour markets are displayed in the framework (Figure 4) where non-nationals work in most private-sector jobs whilst nationals rely on government public sector jobs. Another vulnerability which focuses on the social contract of securing stability in employment is subject to various pressures arising from budget constraints, public productivity constraints and potential political pressures. Unfortunately, the economic contract has three destabilising pressures. These include stagnant low productivity in the private sector, rising tensions between national and non-national workforces and a net outflow of non-nationals who may decide to leave the country permanently. Easy access and a heavy reliance on a generally cheap, non-national labour force negatively impacts the motivation to change. The WEF (2014) suggests that as a result of geopolitical tensions, rising labour demand from other regions, and increasing attractiveness of other countries for non-national workers that the national workforce appears unprepared to take

over the vacated positions. WEF (2014) has recommended some interventions to address these issues which will be discussed later in this chapter.

These labour theories and employability models are all relevant when considering the UAE context; an important question is what is most important to the employer when employment issues are being decided and how can the graduate ensure they are aware of the employers' requirements. More importantly, how can higher education institutions embed employer's needs into the students training programme prior to graduation?

Perceptions of Employability Skills, Attitudes & Technical skills

This section focusses on the literature relating to the perceptions of employability skills, attitudes, interpersonal and technical skills considered either essential or most important in the context of employability.

Harvey (2001) proposes that at the point of recruitment applicants need to display that they can "hit the deck running" or, where skill deficient that "they can get up to speed quickly" with further learning. He suggests that the graduate demonstrate that they are ready for further development and that they recognise the importance of "willingness to learn" together with the importance of "continued learning". Harvey (2001) when discussing employability skills proposes that the graduate demonstrates at the point of recruitment the basic skills or at least the set of generic attributes that the specific discipline, sector or company requires.

The UAE National Qualifications Authority in their Qualifications Framework for the Emirates Handbook (QFEmirates 2018) recognises the key competencies or generic skills required to be effective in the workplace, learning and life. They term these skills as CoreLife skills which

include Information Collecting - analysing, organising and applying information in a given context; Communication – communicating information, concepts and ideas; Organising Oneself – the entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and discovery and the ability to self-organise including the organisation of events and activities. Additionally, they include Working with Others – in teams and leadership; Mathematical / Problem solving – solving problems including using mathematical ideas and techniques; Technology (ICT) – applying information and communication technologies and Societal – participating in civil social life including ethical practice. They define “Skill” as the ability to carry out a task with determined results within a given time and “transferrable skills” as the ability to pick up over time and gain from previous positions the skills that are in demand for employers.

Whereas, the World Health Organization (WHO 2019) defines Core Life skills as the ability for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They categorise them into three components 1. Critical thinking/Decision-making skills; 2. Interpersonal/Communication skills and 3. Coping and self-management skills. The European Council (EC 2018) recommend key competencies for lifelong learning include a greater use of technology, enhanced distance learning, the increase of informal learning through the use of mobile digital devices and adopting the new concepts of sustainability, gender equality, equal opportunities, openness to cultural diversity, creativity and innovation and media literacy. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2014) suggests skills for work and life are grouped into fifteen (15) core competencies with three clusters, 1. Delivery-related, achieving results – including analytical thinking, achievement focus, drafting skills, flexible thinking, managing resources, teamwork and team leadership; 2. Interpersonal,

building relationships – Client focus, diplomatic sensitivity, influencing, negotiating, organisational knowledge and 3. Strategic, planning for the future – developing talent, organisational alignment, strategic networking and strategic thinking.

The United Kingdom (British Council 2017b) advocates that a fully skilled person requires core skills, employability skills and vocational skills. These are 1. Core skills – communication, numeracy, literacy and ICT skills, 2. Employability skills – teamwork, problem solving, initiative, planning and organising, entrepreneurial thinking, self-management and learning and 3. Vocational skills – the occupational and technical skills that are required to do the job. In contrast, Careers Gov. New Zealand (2019) suggests that the seven essential employability skills are 1. Positive attitude – being calm and cheerful when things go wrong, 2. Communication – able to listen and say information clearly when you speak or write, 3. Teamwork – able to help when it gets busy at work, 4. Self-management – able to get to work on time every day and manage your time. Additionally, 5. Willingness to learn – the desire to learn new things to improve your skills, 6. Thinking skills (problem-solving and decision making) – having the ability to try and solve problems or can see when something will not work and finally 7. Resilience – ability to cope with an angry customer, keep calm, keep working and able to laugh about it later.

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF 2018) suggest that the Core skills for work development (CSfW) are distributed into three clusters – 1. Navigate the world of work – manage career and work life, work with roles, rights and protocols, 2. Interact with others – communicate for work, connect and work with others and recognise and utilise diverse perspective, 3. Get the work done – plan and organise, make decisions, identify and solve problems, create and innovate and work in a digital world. The Government of Canada (2018) advises that workplace essential

skills are comprised of reading, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking, computer use and continuous learning.

All countries and organisations acknowledge that there are changing demands and requirements due to the fourth industrial revolution and the rise of Artificial intelligence, the internet of things (IoT), robotics, blockchain, autonomous transport, advanced materials, nanotechnology, 3-D printing, biotechnology and genomics. The World Economic Forum (2016) suggests that the top ten (10) skills required in 2020 will be Complex Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Creativity, People Management, Coordinating with Others, Emotional Intelligence, Judgement and Decision making, Service Orientation, Negotiation and Cognitive Flexibility.

Due to the impact of these imminent changes the UAE National Qualifications Authority in consultation with industry and education organisations are in the process of revising the UAE key employability skills (QFEmirates 2018) into two levels, Entry level and Advanced level of the following categories; Critical thinking – thinking broadly and deeply; Interpersonal skills – building relationships; ICT & Media skills – Interacting in a fast-paced digital world, Innovation and creativity – Challenging mainstream thinking. Also included are Self- management skills – Unleashing your full potential; Entrepreneurial skills - taking ownership of your role; Sustainable development skills – contributing to a sustainable future and Social and Cultural intelligence – being open and tolerant.

There are many different views on what constitutes relevant employability skills and attributes depending on location and circumstances making it difficult to determine a universal set of employment skills and attributes (Saito & Pham 2019). The concept of employability is highly

fluid and ambiguous because it is not necessarily displayed by current employment opportunities and objectives (Jackson 2016). When universities, policymakers and employers discuss skills they are often referring to qualifications whilst the term “skill” is a generic term that considers many various aspects relevant to employability (Universities UK 2018).

A Middle East & North Africa (MENA) study by Bayt.com in 2016 suggested that the main barrier to organisations hiring fresh graduates was the “lack of experience” linked with the “lack of necessary skills”. Jarrar (2018) identified that UAE employers suggest that the priority for future skills necessary for employment are complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management and the ability to coordinate others. Forty per cent of MENA employers advise that there is a skill gap in creative and independent thinking, problem-solving, soft skills and specific sector skills (Jones & Punshi 2013). The UAE requires definitive data to quantify the specific skill gap so that it can be properly assessed and addressed. Ahmed (2019) proposes that the solution for unemployment lies, to a large extent, in the creation of institutions which innovate at the intersection of the 3Es, namely, Education, Employability and Entrepreneurship. This research will investigate what UAE employers perceive to be the most important generic skills required by graduates to improve their chances of employment.

Student Perceptions on Employability

Many studies have been undertaken globally examining student’s perceptions of what makes them employable. From the perspective of market factors, students perceive that they are less employable when they are in their final year of study (Donald et al. 2018; Jackson & Wilton 2017; Qenani et al. 2014) as they gain a greater awareness of the challenges posed by the global labour market. Clarke (2008) also confirmed that the availability of jobs in the global labour market

determines employment opportunities. Hobsons (2017) study of 62,366 students across 65 worldwide universities found that “a high graduate employment rate” is among the top four reasons for choosing a degree program to study at university (Hobsons 2017, p. 7). This section will focus on graduates located in the Middle East or UAE and literature on their perceptions of what they perceive supports them in being employable.

The MENA study by Bayt.com (2016) surveyed 4,247 of the region’s 18-34-year-old graduates who stated finding a job was the biggest challenge faced by fresh graduates. Fresh graduates from the UAE were “very satisfied with the quality of higher education they received and generally “most satisfied” with the qualifications of the teachers, technology usage, curriculum and “preparation for the workforce”. The challenges they face when looking for a job involved a lack of knowledge as to where to find relevant employment and the lack of understanding concerning how to effectively search for jobs, use online jobs sites and how to target companies. Across the MENA region, 52% of the graduates perceive that the main obstacle related to their employability is their “lack of experience” and 32% propose that the “lack of necessary skills” is the main barrier. When asked why they felt industries were willing to hire fresh graduates 45% stated it was because they have lower salary expectations whilst 34% suggested graduates were more compliant and willing to follow instructions.

There were contrasting findings in the survey undertaken by Gulf Talent (2016) on 303 recent graduates who had a broad nationality base and had studied Engineering, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Business at the American University of Sharjah (AUS). The findings concluded that male graduates were focused on jobs within multi-national organisations and technical firms, whereas female graduates chose to work in government or consumer goods firms. The recent

graduates perceived that employers chose them based on having relevant work experiences and if they had a personal connection with the employer. Specifically, Emirati graduates considered their command of English to be a top-selling point with employers followed by the university's prestige and their academic grades. The emphasis on English is supported by Belwal et al. (2017) who found that from a student's perspective an employer's selection criteria includes computing skills, the ability to work in teams, English language proficiency, prior training and the graduate's personality are the most significant employability skills in Oman (MENA country). Although Gulf Talent (2016), advised that the level of success varied across the 303 respondents, with one in three Emiratis having already secured a job offer by their graduation compared to around one in five expatriate graduates.

A study undertaken by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation (2018) across 3,000 high school and Arab university youths found that they are becoming sophisticated in their university and career selection and responsive to market needs. Graduates are pursuing further studies and are willing to work in the private sector or are considering becoming an entrepreneur. Arab youth has high confidence in their academic abilities and skills however once at university, 42% reported that they required more "career-related events and opportunities", more "counselling services" and "extracurricular activities" to support their future careers. Whilst the majority of Arab university students were satisfied with their university experiences, one-third of the surveyed respondents did not feel the university effectively prepared them for their career, they felt they required more support in gaining practical experience on how to prepare for employment.

Expectations of salary packages were an important factor when considering employment globally, Millennials contemplate considering a job based on the salary offer, advancement opportunities

and the jobs location (Career Rookie 2010). The literature stated that both parents and Millennials believed that their first job should provide the “initial payoff” for all the stress, planning and “shared ambition” that they have endured (Howe & Straus 2000). Some graduates believe that it is their right to seek out a position that meets their expectations, and that they will not accept less (Jayasingam & Thurasamy, 2018). Tomlinson (2012) supported this declaring recent graduates think they are taking control over their future life trajectories by being choosy.

Ernst & Young (2015) surveyed 1,000 GCC nationals and 100 employers and found three-quarters of GCC students believed salary packages to be the most important factor when considering accepting a job and 59% cited job security as very important whilst challenging work ranked second to the bottom by 28% of the respondents. The Gulf Talent (2016) survey described graduates salary expectations as varying dramatically based on the graduate’s nationality. Expatriate graduates on average expected a salary of AED 9,000 per month however in contrast, the average starting salary expectation of Emirati graduates was AED 27,000. Ernst & Young (2015) also stated that the biggest challenge to hiring graduates in the GCC remains the high salary expectations. They stated that for GCC students considering a job the three priorities are money, job security and work-life balance.

Employer’s Perception of Employability

The needs of employers vary significantly between countries. The preferred skills in the UK are good communication, teamwork and integrity (City & Guilds Centre for Skills development 2008) whereas in the USA, they are decision-making, problem-solving, verbal communication and information processing (NACE 2014) whilst in Europe, the required skills are teamwork, sector-specific skills and communication (EACEA 2015). Recently a UAE study completed by the British

Council advised that the future job skills list for the UAE included complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management and the ability to coordinate with others (Jarrar 2018).

International employers state when recruiting graduates that they require a positive attitude, relevant work experience, the ability to manage themselves, be effective team players, have basic numeric, written communication, customer service skills, and the ability to analyse problems and produce solutions (CBI 2009). Employers state that a degree is not enough to be employable; the graduate must have the ability to cope with challenges in the workplace and have business awareness skills (GCU 2018). Bakhshi et al. (2017) emphasise interpersonal skills, higher-order cognitive skills and systems skills are the future trend requirements in the UK and US. Although Clark et al. (2014) and Montt (2015) suggest that workers possessing skills at a higher level than those required for the job may also be overlooked for employment. OECD (2016) advised that skills mismatch and shortage are common in advanced economies; however, while policy intervention can address skills mismatch quality information is required about the future skill requirements to do this successfully.

Employers do not perceive vocational skills alone as sufficient to make a person employable; the employer also needs access to new talent and people who have the right mix of skills to perform and meet the business needs at the specific time of the business obligation (UKCES 2014). A report provided by the Confederation of British Industry and Pearson Publishers (CBI/Pearson 2012) in which they surveyed 542 employers, found employers required an improvement of literacy and use of English (35%), numeracy (30%) and reported a weakness in employability skills that included self-management (61%), business and customer awareness (69%), attitudes to work

(37%), teamwork (25%), problem solving (23%) and adequate work experiences (37%). Overall, they recommended employers requested qualification programs that are more relevant to business needs including apprenticeship grants directly for employers, reductions in bureaucracy, flexibility for the employer and a clear definition of apprenticeship programs. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE 2015) advised that small to medium enterprises have a higher priority over a person's skills sets at 47% and work experience at 34% rather than qualifications.

Frey and Osborne (2017) estimate that over the next twenty years 47% of US jobs are at risk of being automated however in contrast, McKinsey Global Institute (2018) studied occupations and human capabilities and found that whilst 49% of work activities can be automated, less than 5% of occupations would be fully automated due to the interpersonal and cognitive skills required to complete the task. Bolden et al. (2009); Cole & Tibby, (2013); UKCES, (2014) recommend integrated approaches by the employer and HEIs that include the big-picture approach of teaching, research and business engagement by undertaking activities such as knowledge transfer partnerships, access to specialist facilities, combined curriculum development, collaborative R&D & consultancy, meaningful student placements, current relevant career advice & support and academic placement to ensure improved employability for graduates.

Foundation for Young Australians (FYA 2017) analysed 4,600 skills requested by employers across 2.7 million job advertisements and found all 7 job clusters required specific soft skills such as communication skills, teamwork problem solving and digital literacy. A survey in Australia by the Department of Employment also found that one-quarter of employers recruiting for entry-level positions had difficulty filling the positions because applicants lacked the necessary employability skills (FYA 2017). In a study of 1,100 manufacturing plants in the UK, Haskell et al. (2005) found

that differences in the level of soft skills of employees resulted in about 3% of the total productivity gap. Female employees in an Indian garment factory were randomly assigned to a soft skills training program and recorded an increase in productivity of 12% on completion of the program (Adhvaryu et al. 2016). Skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and innovation have significant financial benefits to the business as employees who used these skills may be worth more than AUD 2,000 per year to the business. Occupations requiring soft skills are growing 2.5 times faster than other occupations and will outnumber more technical roles by 2030 (Deloitte 2017).

Linkedin (2018) stated in their survey of four thousand (4,000) global managers, talent developers and executives that the number one priority for talent development in 2018 was training in soft skills whilst the age of automation requires the maintenance of technical fluency and an increase in critical thinking and communication. A study done in Malaysia (Zainuddin et al. 2019) identified an impediment to obtaining employment at the entry-level was a poor command of English. Similar findings were made by TalentCorp and World Bank (World Bank 2014) in which the lack of communication skills was cited as a major hindrance to hiring graduates by 81% of employers surveyed which was also supported by a similar study undertaken by Jobstreet.com (2015) amongst 472 clients, managers and senior managers in Malaysia. A 2015 survey of over 450 Australian business managers and executives also found an overwhelming majority of businesses cite teamwork (98%), time management (97%) and communication skills (95%) as being amongst the most vital skills for applicants to have (TAFE NSW 2015). McKinsey Global (2018) surveyed more than 3,000 business leaders in seven countries and found an emphasis on continuous learning and a focus on cross-functional and team-based work to be crucial to

employers. The tasks required to be undertaken by employees in the future will change during their career and employees will not only need to be agile to maintain their careers but also able to undertake independent skills development as well. They found overall that employers expect more social and emotional, higher cognitive and technical skills and less basic cognitive and physical and manual skills from their staff.

Chhinzer & Russo (2018) counselled on the lack of empirical research with employers and cited only three international studies that have explored what employers believe to be important when considering employing graduates. Wickramasinghe & Perera (2010) surveyed 26 employers who indicated that they valued positive work attitude, teamwork, learning skills and self-confidence as most important. Whereas Finch et al. (2013) conducted 30 interviews and 115 qualitative surveys and found employers valued soft skills, problem-solving skills, functional skills, pre-graduate experience and that their academic reputation was important. In the Rosenberg et al. (2012) study they focused on students, professors and human resource managers to validate the differing perceptions and found students valued work ethic, leadership skills and critical thinking. Professors valued interpersonal skills, work ethic and leadership skills whilst human resource managers identified literacy-numeracy skills, followed by work ethic and leadership skills as most needed.

Chhinzer & Russo (2018) collected data from 122 Canadian employers who supervised graduates over a 12-month graduate program. They assessed the graduates using a two-page questionnaire. The data showed that the Canadian employers required professional maturity such as high quality of work, initiative, interest in the work, soft skills (interpersonal skills), written communication skills, verbal communication skills and problem-solving (adaptability, leadership skills and creativity). The third factor was the individual's responsibility towards continuous learning and

their focus on the desire to learn. In summary, the graduates needed to have overall communication, time management, teamwork, attention to detail, acceptance of feedback and willingness to work to create a holistic awareness of the work construct.

In the UAE, Jarrar (2018) found in recent interviews with employers that they indicated the private sector has only slight contact and collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Education or educational institutions other than attending career fairs. They determined that employers wished to engage with institutions to support apprenticeships and practical learning. Jarrar (2018) advised that the private sector recommends that the approach of educational institutions to teaching should be to provide skills for the future, teach students how to learn, question, reflect and apply what they have learnt. Ernst & Young (2015) states that GCC employers struggle to find graduates with the skills they need, especially at entry-level, and they point to punctuality, innovation, adaptability, and handling work stress as major areas of weakness. Essential soft skills are often underdeveloped, and Ernst & Young (2015) suggests it is due to limited extra-curricular opportunities within and outside of school and that teaching approaches are not encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership or communication.

Jarrar (2018) identified that UAE employers suggest that the priority for future skills necessary for employment are complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management and the ability to coordinate others. Jones & Punshi (2013) cautioned that 40% of MENA employers advise that there is a skills gap in creative and independent thinking, problem-solving, soft skills, and specific sector skills. The UAE requires definitive regular data to quantify the specific skill gaps so that the matter can be addressed.

Future Employability

Future employability requirements will be changing due to the fourth industrial revolution, further development of artificial intelligence in the workforce, globalisation and demographic changes (OECD 2017). It is expected that 25% of jobs will change as a result of automation, and many new jobs will be created whilst technological progress will foster new approaches to work such as "crowd work", "gig work" and other forms of on-demand labour (OECD 2017). The global drivers of change in the workplace include the high-speed mobile internet, artificial intelligence, big data, analytics & cloud technology, as well as the spread of new technologies, expansion of education and the middle class, greener global economies and advances in new energy and companies investing in technologies, iCloud computing, machine learning and augmented & virtual reality (WEF 2017).

Freelancing, outsourcing and offshoring will continue to grow to prepare young people for jobs of the future by ensuring that they have the right types of skills to navigate the ever-changing and technology-rich environment whilst also giving them an opportunity to maintain their skills, and upskill and reskill throughout their working life (OECD 2017). The WEF (2017) warns that by 2022, 54% of all employees will require significant reskilling and upskilling whilst the government will need to address the impact of new technologies on the labour market as well as upgrading education policies and soft skills to leverage human talent. Industries will need to upskill their current workforce in the use of new technologies and workers will need to take personal responsibility for their own lifelong learning and career development (WEF 2017).

The potential impact of job automation in the UAE is estimated to affect 47% of all work activities (WEF 2017). There will be demand for jobs in data analysis, computer science and engineering

and a strong demand for professions who can blend their digital and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math skills) with analytical skills including the use of the latest analytical tools. There will be a demand for seamless human and machine interaction. The UAE will have an increase in new medium and low-skillset jobs, jobs in childcare, eldercare and education facilities. The Care economy and focus on early-childhood education for human capital development will become more important (WEF 2017; LinkedIn 2018). Another critical area in the UAE will be the energy efficiency sector which is expected to be the largest generator of new jobs within the UAE with a projected 160,000 new jobs by 2030 (WEF 2017).

Skills expected to be in high demand in 2022 are analytical thinking and innovation, as well as active learning and learning strategies. There will be an increased emphasis on skills such as technology design and programming. Competency in new technologies is only one part of the 2022 skills requirements as there will be an increased requirement for 'human' skills such as creativity, originality and initiative, critical thinking, persuasion and negotiation. Additionally, to be able to work in these new jobs, workers will require attention to detail, resilience, flexibility and complex problem-solving. Emotional intelligence, leadership and social influence, as well as service orientation, will also grow in demand (WEF 2017).

The World Economic Forum (2017) suggests 54% of all current employees in the Middle East will require significant reskilling and upskilling with 12% of these employees requiring less than a month's training whilst 9% will require 6-12 months reskilling. Their research indicates Middle Eastern employers will respond by looking at automating the work (89%), hiring new permanent staff with the relevant technological skills (84%), retrain existing employees (78%) or expect the existing employees to pick up the skills on the job (73%) or hire new temporary staff as well as

outsource or hiring freelancers with the relevant skills (72%).

Finally, policymakers, regulators and educators will need to help those who are displaced to repurpose their skills or retrain to acquire new skills. The focus will be on investing heavily in the development of responsive learners in future workforces by tackling improvements to education and training systems and updating labour policy to match the realities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (WEF 2017; OECD 2017).

Higher Education and Employability

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding employability has changed significantly from the 1900s when the institution taught specialised technical/academic data for the degree and supplied some vocational guidance and job placement. Then, in the 1990s career counselling and professional networking were added to the mix. Today HEIs are accountable to ensure the graduate is employable upon graduating. The political and economic dialogue has determined that employability is the responsibility of HEIs (Gracia 2009). Universities have been given responsibility to prepare the workers that employer's need (Boden & Nedeva 2010). Cherkorskaya & Watt (2017) claim employability has redefined "what universities are ultimately for". Ahmed (2019) suggests a crucial element of the industry and educational leaders is to align workplace needs with the higher education preparation systems to promote student success in a career after graduation. Donald et al. (2018) advocate that student career transition from HEI to labour market now has a greater focus on students gaining additional skills while at university that relate to their perceived employability as well as skills that can be realistically transferred into the workplace from the employer's perspective. The degree alone is no longer enough (Stevenson & Clegg 2011). Many universities in Australia, New Zealand and the UK have embedded work-

integrated learning programs into their degrees to enhance the employability of graduates (Rowe & Zegwaard 2017). This is based on the premise that universities can and should produce “work-ready” employable graduates (Holmes 2013).

Surveys on graduate employment outcomes have been undertaken by HEIs in Australia and the UK for many years and the data has been used as a higher education institution performance indicator (Rowe & Zegwaard 2017). Additionally, New Zealand has been collecting information on a graduate longitudinal study over the last ten years (Tustin et al. 2016). Similar initiatives have commenced in the UAE (HCT 2018).

Dey & Cruzvergara (2014) suggest HEIs need to use a holistic ‘ecosystem’ approach to students’ careers and their employability by making it the staff’s responsibility within the HEI to support and develop the student’s employability opportunities. This requires both employer involvement within the institution and staff involvement in the workplace with leadership and resources being invested in the institution to ensure positive employability outcomes. The program design and delivery needs to include employers whilst students need to focus on the mastery of skills that are not only transferred to the workplace but evolve throughout the student's career. UKCES (2009) suggests that employability should be in the HEIs vision, values, strategic plan, KPIs and part of every staff member's core business.

Cole & Tibby (2013) recommend engaging alumni networks and ensuring that they become an integral part of the teaching institution for a "lifetime" offering lifelong learning, involvement in mentorship programs, workshops and offering invitations to lecture and network at the HEI. HEIs have a duty to interact and be relevant to the community. Contact with industry experts able to co-

teach with professors in the areas of their expertise with a greater focus on internships and apprenticeships encourages integration and connectedness between the employer and the institution (Anastasiu et al. 2017).

In Vision 2021, the United Arab Emirates has mandated that "universities will listen closely to the needs of Emiratis and their future employers and will vary their teaching to the demands of the workplace". The focus is to ensure that UAE graduates join the world of work and that the "UAE harnesses the full potential of its national human capital" (UAE Vision 2017). Ernst & Young (2015) interviewed 100 private enterprise employers and 700 university students throughout the GCC to gather data on the perceived GCC skills gap. Their findings recommended greater collaboration between HEIs and the private sector, embedding a balance of practical skills, enterprise thinking, together with a government mandate and focus on increasing employment in the private sector.

The UAE is among the top spenders per capita globally on education in 2016; the government committed AED 21.4 Billion towards education (MOE 2019b). The National Higher Education Strategy 2030 is focussed on strengthening accreditation standards, increasing the research output, further developing the qualifications framework and enhancing a curriculum centred on employment in consultation with the business sector. The Federal Ministry of Higher Education (MOE) is the dedicated authority responsible for developing policies related to higher education and research. The MOE's Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) licenses federal and private HEIs nationwide. It keeps a public database of all licensed institutions and the programs that they are accredited to deliver. For Technical and Vocational Education Training the quality assurance is managed by a federal Vocational Education and Training Awards Council (VETAC).

However, in free zones foreign education providers are required to be fully accredited in their home countries and the University and Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) under KHDA issues licenses to foreign free zone HEIs and approves programs in Dubai, whilst in the emirate of Abu Dhabi the CAA approves licenses for free zone providers (MOE 2019b).

In 2016 there were 77,463 international tertiary students studying in the UAE (UNESCO 2019), at over seventy universities. The security concerns and political insecurity across the MENA region has made UAE an attractive destination for students (Jose & Chacko 2017). Indians make up 17% (2016) of all international students whilst the bulk of the remainder come from Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Oman and Pakistan. The employment opportunities for highly skilled workers and the progressively diversifying economy make the UAE an attractive study destination (MOE 2019b). The UAE is a major hub for Transnational Education (TNE). Seven of the country's HEIs have international ratings, University of Birmingham, American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates University, Khalifa University, American University in Dubai, University of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi University (MOE 2019b). In Dubai, there are 39 HEIs including 24 foreign branch campuses from 12 different countries. Overall there are more than 100 HEIs affiliated to universities across the world offering many different programs (KHDA 2014). There are universities located throughout the Emirates with three Federal universities – the United Arab Emirates University, Zayed University and The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). There are also many private universities such as the New York University, Sorbonne-Universite, the University of Wollongong, Murdoch University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Canadian University Dubai, Heriot-Watt University and Middlesex University. Other nations are also represented such as the Swiss Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne, The British University

in Dubai and Indian institutions such as the Birla Institute of Technology and the Institute of Management Technology, Iran's Islamic Azad University are a few examples (KHDA 2014; MOE 2019b). These establishments offer potential commercial opportunities for the UAE.

Globally International students constitute one of the top export industries. In 2016 international students brought an estimated USD 39.4 billion into the United States economy, in Australia (USD 24.7 billion), Canada (USD 15.5 Billion) and the United Kingdom (USD 31.9 billion) (Ligami 2019). In the UAE most students in Transnational Education Institutions (TNE) are either expatriates or international students however in 2017 the balance began to change with 30% of students enrolled in private institutions being Emirati (KHDA 2014).

Employability Initiatives by Higher Education Institutions

Work placement, Internships and Graduate Programs

UAE Federal HEIs have updated their degrees to ensure that there is a mandatory 8-12-week placement for all students and in some cases one-year internship in the specialised sector of the student's specific degree major. Yorke & Knight (2006) state that work experience is often used by employers as a central part of their graduate recruitment process. Some employers prefer to assess students during their placement to gauge their suitability on the job although the process is costly and time-consuming. However, not all enterprises can afford the time to give to placement or internships. Gault et al. (2000) found in the study of 500 graduates that internships resulted in receiving job offers about ten weeks sooner and starting salaries 10% higher than graduates that had not undertaken internships. Universities UK (2018) advise that universities are being more innovative in their approaches to work experience using short-term insight days, work shadowing, collaborative projects and sandwich placements. Although critical to the success of work

experience is the willingness of employers to provide it and ensure the experience is meaningful. Maslen (2019) supports the claim that work experiences should be meaningful and relevant and provide the undergraduate with an opportunity to build skills. Policies to support employers to provide opportunities should be a priority for governments, especially with small to medium enterprise (Universities UK 2018). Gault et al. (2010) advised internships provide the students with a means of bridging the gap between career expectations and the reality of post-graduation employment. Clarke (2017) suggests a one-year employer development programs supports and assists in developing skills and competencies although the nature and structure of these programmes varies. Some employers take a generalist approach offering organisational focussed training and job rotation whilst others are more specialised however they could include development programs, mentoring and job rotation (Poocharoen & Lee 2013). Graduate programmes require a significant employer investment and are seen as a long-term strategic human resource management plan (Shaw & Fairhurst 2008). Another issue is the lack of alignment between the graduate's field of study and their placement in the organisation. Sometimes, graduates find themselves in an area totally unrelated to their studies and feel they are "marking time" rather than making the best of the program. When the program does not have defined tasks and outcomes this hampers the development of skills for the graduate (Clarke 2017). Well-managed graduate programs identify talented graduates and foster loyalty and commitment to the employer (King 2003).

Curriculum

Harvey (2001) recommends developing employability attributes by embedding general attributes into the curriculum which develop and empower lifelong learners. Belwal et al. (2016)

acknowledge that to be a successful university, the institution needs to design and implement their program curriculum to include developing student awareness regarding the need to focus on long-term career development, extension of the skills set whilst facilitating the students' exposure and collaboration with industry.

In the UK, Birmingham City University has prioritized employer engagement with the aim of enhancing the students' employability. In addition to offering job placements, internships, and student mentoring they redesigned the curriculum to ensure it was relevant to market needs by inviting employers to take part in developing the curriculum which ensured that the courses directly feature employers in content delivery. Employers, external examiners, and senior academics are all involved in assessing the students (EY 2015). Ernst & Young (2015) recommend balancing the curricula with practical skills and academic understanding which is relevant to the current and future job market whilst integrating work experience into the curriculum.

The UAE Federal HEIs have regular program advisory board meetings with industry to discuss the programs offered to students, the currency and relevancy of the data to the industry and to seek updates and recommendations. At one federal HEI, all degrees require a professional certification component embedded into the curriculum; for example, a human resources degree will include the ability to gain professional certification with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (HCT 2018). Additionally, students who participate in extracurricular activities, have a competitive advantage in gaining a job as they develop valuable skills and experiences (Kaufman & Gabler 2004; Stuart et al. 2011; Lahbabi 2015).

Deloitte (2017) cite Deakin University in Australia as embedding soft skills into all their degrees alongside the technical or disciplinary skills as key capabilities for graduates and the university assess those skills in the same manner as they assess technical skills. Deloitte suggest other universities are also increasing the emphasis on soft skills. They are attaching credentials to the soft skills as it allows employers an insight into the graduate's soft skill capabilities whilst allowing employers a more scientific approach to evaluating skills gaps. In Germany and Switzerland soft skills such as student behaviour, problem-solving, creative thinking, and collaboration are graded (Greenberg & Nilssen 2015). Although Ferns & Zegwaard, (2014), suggest designing a curriculum that scaffolds learning focused on employability capabilities, using Work Integrated learning and other approaches challenges traditional teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) includes a range of experiential and practice-based learning models such as internships, fieldwork, volunteering, project-based work, simulations, practicums which are all designed to boost employment outcomes (Rowe & Zegwaard 2017). Although Clark (2017) noted that WIL activities must be meaningful, relevant, and intentionally integrated and aligned in the university curriculum (Sachs et al. 2017).

Digital Badges

Digital Badges are an emerging technology in education that allows a digital record the achievement of knowledge, skills, and competency in a range of training and development activities which can contribute to meaningful learning to be maintained (Mah et al. 2016). They incorporate skills-based curricula and are accessible within and outside the classroom (IMS Global 2019). Digital Badges can be part of an e-portfolio permitting a digital credentials ecosystem to connect learners, educational providers, and employers in a more meaningful way (IMS Global

2019). Digital Badges are currently in use or are under development at MIT, Carnegie Mellon, Purdue, The University of California, and industries such as NASA, Capital One, JP Morgan (Purdue 2012). Digital Badges are an opportunity to recognize learning anytime both formal and informal (Mah et al. 2016). West and Lockley (Mah et. al. 2016) indicated Digital Badges can connect learning pathways between vocational education, higher education, and other training providers. They could document lifelong learning and could be shared between professional network platforms and with potential employers (Glover & Latif 2013) however, stakeholder acceptance and quality assurance is crucial for the implementation of digital badges (Mah et. al. 2016). The stakeholder needs to have buy-in, they require robust quality processes and they require clear transparency on relevance and assessment (Jovanovi & Devedzic 2015).

Career Guidance & Support

A study by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation (2018) surveyed Arab youth across the MENA region and suggested three key areas that need to be addressed. These included choice of college and career information increased experiential learning and professional support. College and career information consists of up-to-date, personalised information, one-stop location at both high school and university to help students understand their career choices and opportunities. Experiential learning suggests that writing, communication workshops, CV preparation, and development of soft skills be included within high school and university. Professional support refers to career counsellors at high school and university, work experience outside of academia and personalised context-relevant support to promote academic success. Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT 2018) requires each of its campuses to have a career centre which not only assists students in their

career decisions but also acts as a career resource centre whilst providing work skill seminars and “meet the employer” days.

Ernst & Young (2015) also recommend making job seeking a priority whilst ensuring that there is alignment between education, training, and the employer’s needs. Harvey (2001) suggest HEIs should be audited on the range of employability and the development of opportunities offered to students, however, the audit does not need to display the effectiveness of what is provided but be a simplistic measurement and indication of the process and what could be improved upon or identify gaps in student development. Harvey (2001) suggests that institutions should provide the tools for employability but ultimately it is the individual student’s responsibility to use them to become employed whilst “ensuring the graduate is employed” should not be an institutional achievement but rather providing the employability tools for the student should be the requirement.

Collaboration – Government, Employers, Community & HEI

Currently the private sector and the education system work in silos, they lack the approaches for sharing and developing the skills for employability however there is now a need for common ownership and joint responsibility (WEF 2017). Universities and employers need to collaborate and develop new innovative partnerships whilst every effort needs to be made by government to adopt a whole-skills approach to embed educator-employer partnerships across policy to support this objective (Universities UK 2018). Close collaboration is needed among schools, universities, government and the private sector to deliver college and career information, experiential learning whilst informing the development of educational courses and programs. Additionally, the community, parents and guardians need to be made aware of the nation’s goals and the required skills whilst supporting the graduate students' career decisions (EY 2015).

The outcome of this collaboration can be assessed by the quality of the graduates upon their graduation (Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation 2018). As the employer's demand for graduates increases and different skills are required employers need to work more closely with universities to communicate their needs so that the talent pool can be widened (Universities UK 2018). Becker's (1993) theory on human capital suggest HEIs strategies need to be closely aligned with the Government's workforce development policy. Additionally, closer collaboration is required between HEIs and the employers (Hall & Thomas 2005; Cai 2013). An enhanced dialogue and partnership between HEIs and employers is required which is difficult to implement because of the different organisational cultures of both parties (Reeve & Gallacher 2005).

A closer alignment with supporting incentives to facilitate the dialogue between the Ministry of Education, current and potential labour, industry, related government agencies and private and public sector partnerships is required (WEF 2017). The regions public and private sectors need to work together to ensure the talent pool is expanded, better prepared and better skilled for the future (WEF 2017). Higher education, employer's and policymakers need to work together to develop a more agile flexible and responsive graduate to succeed in an increasingly uncertain and disrupted future (Universities UK 2018). Also, more learning needs to take place in collaboration with governments, schools, universities, and non-formal education providers to build a more resilient talent pool with Employers needing to be more engaged in this process (WEF 2017).

Policymakers, regulators, and educators need to reskill or retrain the workforce to prepare for the realities of the fourth industrial revolution (WEF 2018). The Markle Foundation has a program called "Skilful" which aims to help workers without college degree upgrade and market their skills (MGI 2018), Singapore has introduced the "Skills Future Initiative" which provides Singaporeans

over 25 a USD 400 credit to pay for approved work skills-related courses. Belgium uses training vouchers to facilitate the upgrading of skills. Dusseldorf has a strong network of industry associations and educational institutions to inform employees about developments in the labour market and educational offers available. These interactions have also helped to develop and expand apprenticeships and on the job training (MGI 2018). Governments, organisations, and society need to work together to develop strategies and policies to govern the impact of technology in the future (PwC 2017). Policymakers, regulators, and educators will play a role in repurposing the skills or retraining the current and future workforce by updating labour policy to match the realities of the Fourth Industrial revolution (WEF 2017).

Employability Initiatives by UAE Government & Emiratisation

Due to the structural divisions in the labour market, the UAE government launched the Emiratisation (Tawteen in Arabic) campaign. This mandates the employment of Emiratis in the job sector and, specifically the private sector. It is designed to increase the number of youths and adults available with the relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship (MOE 2019a). Federal Law No 8 of 1980 in article 10 discusses a special department dedicated to find adequate job opportunities for nationals whilst assisting employers in fulfilling their needs. Ministerial orders 41,42, and 43 of 2005 have imposed a quota system on the private sector where every company employing more than 100 personnel must also employ minimum stipulated numbers of UAE nationals. In 2011 Ministerial decision number (544) set up a new classification of companies based on the number of UAE nationals employed and the classification offers several incentives for companies to meet the Emiratisation targets including lower labour card fees (Abu Dhabi.ae,

2018). In 2017, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (MoHRE) required all data entry positions to be localised, creating 1,000 new jobs for Emiratis. Additionally, all construction facilities with a workforce of 500 or more were required to appoint at least one Emirati occupational health and safety officer from 2017.

In 2005, quotas were regulated in the Trade and Banking Sectors. Researchers have written about the challenges related to the quota system (Aghazadeh 2004; Salem, 2010; Ramady 2005). In 2007 a Cabinet resolution was released regulating the treatment of GCC nationals on a par with UAE Nationals. Additionally, there are specific rules and regulations for recruiting nationals (MOE 2019a). In 2009, a Cabinet Resolution was released detailing the regulation regarding terminating UAE Nationals working in the private sector.

The focus continues to be on securing positions for locals. His excellency Nasser bin Thani Al Hamli, Minister of Human Resources and Emiratization (MoHRE) advised “3,390 contracts were signed by male and female citizens to work for companies operating in the financial, banking, insurance, retail and tourism sectors” as part of the Qualitative Emiratization Acceleration Initiative (MOE 2019b). The focus of the Emiratization program is to move from a dependence on oil revenues to assisting and supporting UAE nationals to find meaningful work in the private sector (Forstenlechner et al. 2012).

Extensive research has been undertaken on Emiratization in the areas of strategy and policy (Randeree 2009; Rees et. al. 2007), culture (Farrell 2008), politics (Toledo 2013), policy relating to government and institutions (All-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014; Forstenlechner & Rutledge,

2010) organizational commitment (Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011; Shaw, Delery & Abdulla, 2003) and education (Pech 2009; Raven 2011). The program is evolving and dynamic.

Entrepreneurship

The UAE government is promoting entrepreneurship and approaches for increasing the focus on starting businesses whilst making it easier for small to medium enterprises to undertake business as well as also encouraging access to business start-up funding together with restructuring the bankruptcy laws (Farasin & Battaloglu 2017). In a competitive job market, an entrepreneurial spirit, flexibility and eagerness to achieve results are very important (Ahmed 2019), Research supports entrepreneurship as a crucial generator of jobs (Momani 2017). Literature has acknowledged employability and entrepreneurship are complementary skills (Ahmed 2019). Ahmed (2019) suggests government leaders need to ensure the link between education, employability and entrepreneurship is stronger. Many Arab countries have instigated and explored entrepreneurial initiatives as an approach to build job creation and economic growth (Momani 2017). Although the 2011 World bank report noted relatively low levels of SME financing with only 8% of bank loans in the MENA region being allocated to SMEs, ranging from 2% in the Gulf states to 13% in the rest of the region (Rocha 2011). Salem (2013) estimates, up to USD 160-180 billion is needed to assist formal SMEs in scaling up their ventures in the MENA region.

Private Sector Employability Challenges

The public sector employs more than 80% of GCC nationals, and this is putting a significant burden on public funds (Moubayed 2017). The government is transferring ownership of key public sector enterprises to the private sector. Currently, 50% of economic activity in the UAE is being generated

by small to medium enterprises. The current focus is on building the knowledge-based economy and expanding manufacturing into high-value industries such as space, pharmaceuticals, health and the nuclear industry. Emiratis are being advised that jobs in Government are no longer available and that they need to prepare for private-sector jobs in sectors such as logistics, manufacturing, construction, tourism and finance (Jarrar 2018). The focus is on ensuring that Emiratis have the portable skills to work in high knowledge industries and ensure they can maximise their potential. Globally there are different requirements for Public, Private, SMEs and Multinational companies (Archer & Davidson 2008).

The UAE labour laws in the private sector were originally established to exploit cheap labour by local and foreign-owned business, with no minimum wage, no protection against terminating staff and no trade unions (Abdalla et al. 2010). This strategy aided the rapid transformation and development of the country (Hourani 1991). However, the consequences were that nationals preferred secure well-paid jobs, with security and pensions in the public sector (PwC 2009). Some Emiratis not only work in a government job but also run a business in the private sector employing expatriates within the business (Shah 2006).

Mellahi (2007) stated Emiratis prefer to wait for a job in the government to become available as it determines their “social status” and that there is no economic immediacy to secure a job. There are specific types of jobs that nationals and employers considered as ‘not suitable’ for Emiratis (Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner 2010). Thompson & Wissink (2016) refer to the ‘mudir’ syndrome that relates to being employed in a position of authority, status and respect. This syndrome is a significant challenge to UAE policymakers. It perpetuates the research suggesting ‘mudir’ could be related to the labour market segmentation theory where jobs are segmented into primary and

secondary. Research by Rees et al. (2007), Raven (2011) and Randerree (2012) advise Emiratis view jobs in the lower segment (secondary segment) of the labour market as beneath them, and they would rather not work than take a job that involves menial, repetitive work without status, benefits, security and high remuneration. Althani (2012) & Davidson (2008) suggest countries that have relied on oil such as the UAE have developed a society with a 'rentier mentality' loosely explained as a system and culture where the citizens become dependent on the state to support them by distributing wealth and ensuring they are provided with subsidies, grants, interest-free loans and free public services (EIU 2011).

Forstenlechner et al. (2012) surveyed 250 UAE human resource management personnel to ascertain the recruitment decisions of employers. They found the overall preference was to employ expatriates, as it was easier to hire, manage and terminate them while they also cost less. They did not perceive employing an Emirati to be problematic about culture, qualifications, or education. Although Forstenlechner et al. (2012) were concerned with the level of motivation and longevity of the Emirati as they may find the position inappropriate or lacking prestige, they may also leave when a government position becomes available, and they tend to cost significantly more than expatriates do. They were not concerned about the education and qualifications or ability to do the job. The study recommended clear government policy on private sector employment laws for Emiratis, obligatory internship programs and incentives for the private sector to recruit and employ Emiratis. While this does not deal with the Emirati's, motivation to work in the private sector it helps the employer to be more willing to hire an Emirati.

The private sector generates 35% of the Gulf States' GDP, which totals USD 120 Billion in trade within the GCC while employing 80% of the workforce however only a small percentage of

private-sector employees are nationals (Dashti 2017). In 2008, private sector jobs constituted 63.3% of the total workforce in the UAE (Al Khan 2012). While in 2010, Emiratis held only 0.5% of private-sector jobs (Melly 2010). In 2016, the government stated 3.38% of UAE nationals were employed in the private sector with a total of 7.19% employed across the full workforce (UAE Vision 2018). With the majority of UAE graduates being Emirati and the increasingly limited number of jobs in the public sector there is an urgent need for Emiratis to work in the private sector, as the old model of the public sector providing jobs is no longer sustainable (EY 2015).

Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner (2012) suggest the two main reasons UAE nationals are not working in the private sector is the lack of private sector exposure as 98% of the national workforce is currently working in the public sector and there is a gap in employment conditions including remuneration and working hours. There is a perception among UAE nationals that the UAE public sector offers excellent job security (Al-Ali 2008; Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner 2010; Rees et al. 2007) and it is seen as culturally inappropriate (Al-Ali 2008; Goby et al. 2015). Ernst & Young, (2015) advise the high financial incentives, shorter working hours, longer holidays and excellent job security in the public sector has reduced the motivation or desire to work in the private sector. Ryan (2015) suggests that less than 2% of UAE nationals work in the private workforce.

However, Chang et al. (2015) and Petty & Cacioppo (2012) suggest that a consistent targeted media campaign promoting the image of a few UAE national successes within the private sector and a persuasive message through social media could be a catalyst for a change of attitude and behaviour. Hamed Al Qasemi, a senior recruitment officer at Etimad holdings, has suggested over the last two years that there has been a shift in employees being more willing to work in the private sector (Zacharias 2018).

Dajani (2018) reported that Mr Al Hamil from the Federal National Council (FNC) claimed that there were 197,000 potential new jobs in the private sector in 2018 over the four-month period of January to April. In the first four months of 2018, there has been a 50% increase of Emiratis being recruited for jobs in comparison to the same period last year (Dajani 2018).

The Government's goal is to increase employment in general over the next decade and more specifically, Emirati employment by 20-30% (Al Khan 2012). In March 2019, the UAE Cabinet granted equal public holiday leave (14 days) to both the public and private sector employees. The decision aimed to achieve a balance between the two sectors by unifying the number of official holidays to which they are entitled (Government.ae 2019b).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research is an adaption of several dissimilar employability models and frameworks arising from the complexity and uniqueness of the UAE context. Cole and Tibby (2013) recommend that the overall goal for a study such as this is a defined, cohesive and comprehensive approach to employability. The first stage of this research requires discussion and reflection with the stakeholders to define what key components constitute UAE graduate employability. The context of employability in the UAE is unique due to the pace of change and development within the country. This research proposes to focus on employers across all twelve (12) UAE industry sectors as well as the many distinct types of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operating in the UAE, and their attitudes towards UAE graduate employability. This data will be used to inform HEI employability strategies.

The UAE Graduate Employability Framework was developed by the researcher using several global models as a basis. For example, both the Knight & York (2004) USEM Model of

employability & The Pool & Sewell (2007) CareerEDGE model which focused on the graduate displaying subject understanding as well as important workplace skills and personal qualities as required, were used and adapted for the UAE context. Also, the Guilbert et al. (2016) global and cultural employability context was blended into the model as it links employability with other constructs whilst incorporating organisational strategies and governmental policies into the employability decision. Finally, the World Economic Forum (2014) framework concerning the dynamics and vulnerabilities of the employment system in GCC countries was incorporated into the UAE study framework as the WEF approach considered the stakeholder's perceptions regarding youth unemployment as significant. The WEF (2014) framework deliberated upon the primary purpose of the employment system in the GCC which aims to secure stability and ensure economic prosperity. This is an important factor that needed to be incorporated into this study to ensure that the UAE context was adequately covered. The broad spectrum of local factors such as labour market policies, labour laws, Emiratization quotas and visa considerations needed to be incorporated into the model as any combination of them could influence an employer's decision to engage UAE graduates. However, the degree to which these factors influence the employability decision will be amongst the variables examined in this study.

The Figure 1 titled "UAE Graduate Employability Framework" blends both the macro and micro considerations influencing UAE graduate employability. The process of how the UAE graduate is assessed for employment within the UAE is extremely dynamic and is likely to be subject to continual change as the market matures. Therefore, this framework is intended to provide a portrait of the current considerations that an employer may reflect upon when making the decision to employ UAE graduates. Those influences include government policy, economic forces as well as

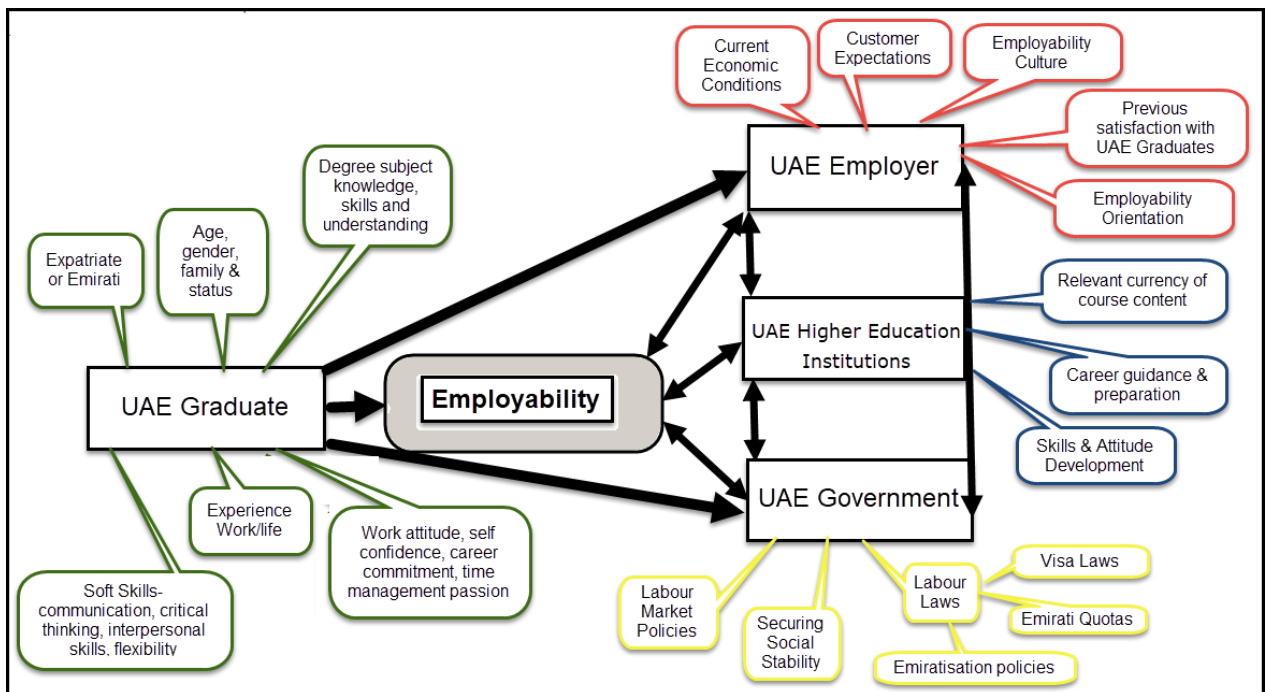
the ability of higher education institutions to produce graduates that are perceived as employable by the employer. This research will evaluate the validity of the model and the significance of the impact the various influences have upon the employer when making the decision to engage UAE graduates.

This practical model of UAE graduate employability places Employability central within the framework surrounded by the main actors in the process being the UAE Employer, HEIs, UAE government and the UAE graduate. The primary factors influencing the employability decision for each actor are also shown. These factors, or influences, will guide this enquiry in its investigation of the employer's priorities when considering UAE graduates for employment. The UAE employer's decision could be influenced by the current economic conditions, the customers' expectations, the current employability culture in the workplace and the employer's previous experiences with UAE graduates. These factors may influence the employability orientation. Van Dam (2004) suggested employability orientation was influenced by how a company's objectives and interventions may be used to support an employee's development. For instance, they could include the ongoing development of employability activities, career management, as well as an emphasis on lifelong learning to increase the individual employee's employability. Guilbert et al. (2016) claims employability is the result of interactions between the individual, organizational strategies, governmental and educational policies. The economic conditions include the employer's perception of the prevailing economic climate as well as their access to available, cheaper or more experienced labour. In addition to this, the employer may also consider the community and customer expectations in the industry. For instance, the major chosen by the graduate, the graduates GPA, the quality of the education offered by the HEI, the relevancy and

currency of the course content and the HEIs' reputation may all be influences to be considered by an employer before a graduate is engaged.

Further to this, the importance placed by the employer on the individual graduate's psychological attributes of self-efficacy, esteem, confidence, motivation and emotional intelligence are also of significance. Is it important to the employer whether or not the graduate has generic skills, and if so which ones may be more important than others?

Figure 1: UAE Graduate Employability Framework (Hassock 2019)



Research over twenty-five years by the 'Pedagogy for Employability Group' (2004) suggests that employers expect graduates to display generic skills such as imagination/creativity; adaptability/flexibility; willingness to learn; autonomy; ability to work with others; manage others; work under pressure; display good oral, written communication; numeracy; attention to detail; time

management; decision making ability; the ability to plan and organise, entrepreneurship skills and use new technologies however these may be required in differing proportions depending on the industry and the position applied for. A further question to be addressed in relation to the individual graduate is how much influence does the graduates' age, gender, nationality and family status concern the employer when making the employability decision.

It is acknowledged that employability is a dynamic and evolving interaction between government and educational policies, organizational strategies, the graduate's characteristics as well as the social, economic, cultural and technological context (Guilbert et al. 2016). This research will not only investigate whether the UAE Graduate employability model has correctly considered all necessary factors and influences but also whether the emphasis should be amended to include other considerations important to employers when making the decision to employ UAE graduates. This information will guide HEI employability strategies.

Table 1 displays a literature summary table on the key relevant research conducted in the GCC region in relation to employability. It includes the findings and contribution of the scholarly work. Most research conducted throughout the region focuses on the student perception or in the UAE the focus of Emiratization.

Table 1: MENA/GCC or UAE Literature Summary of Key Employability Research

Region	Research	Methodology	Contribution/Originality
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GCC	Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010.	Document analysis	There is a need to update the social contract to reflect contemporary demographic and Labour-market realities.
GCC	WEF 2014.	Stakeholder consultation in the session of the WEF Annual Meeting.	A demographic "youth bulge" represents a great challenge and opportunity. Solutions to date show little progress in confronting the youth unemployment, possibly because of a lack of common understanding of the risks associated with comprehensive solutions are too high. The foundations of the social contract needs to be modified and the implementation of systematic solutions.
GCC	Farasin & Battaloglu 2017.	Document analysis	Youth unemployment is high. Supporting and development SMEs will aid in providing jobs. To do this the insolvency and credit rules and the ease of doing business in the Gulf states needs to be improved. Minority investors need to be protected, ease of cross-border trade and amending property and contract laws are required.
GCC	Ernst Young 2015.	Surveyed 1,000 GCC nationals aged 16-25 years, 700 university students from both public and private universities and 201 employers	Recommendations to create an ecosystem of progress from education into employment. Four key areas for attention 1. aligning curriculum with employer needs, 2. Developing the workforce through experience and training, 3. Providing information about careers, 4. Encouraging a culture of employment, innovation and entrepreneurship.
GCC - Oman	Belwal et al. 2017.	Combination of focus groups and surveys across final year students.	Students perceived employer selection to be made on computing skills, their ability to work in teams their English level, their prior training/work experience and the graduate's personality.
MENA	Bayt & YouGov 2016.	Survey - 4,247 of the region's 18-34-year-old students & graduates	Most graduates were generally satisfied with the quality of higher education they received, although they did not feel the education prepared them to target their industry of choice. Banking/Finance, Engineering/Design and Advertising/Marketing / Public Relations emerged as the most appealing employment sectors for fresh graduates across the MENA region. Graduates in the UAE and Qatar had the most optimistic outlook towards finding a job.
MENA	Jose & Chacko 2017.	Data collected mainly through secondary sources.	Found Educational governance and market factors are identified as the key pillars which contribute to the economic efficiency into the HE sectors. The study attempted to examine sustainability in the HE sector in terms of economic efficiency.

MENA	WEF 2017.	Document analysis	Low but increasing levels of workforce participation by women, high rates of unemployment, especially among the young and well educated. Highly skilled graduates unemployment and jobs susceptible to automation. A need to prepare for technical disruptions, need for upskilling and reskilling of the current population.
MENA	Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation 2018.	Survey to 3,000 Arab high school and university students	Arab youth are sophisticated in their career selection, they have high confidence in their academic abilities and skills, 43% of Arab youth advised high school did not prepare them for university, they felt universities should have provided more career-related events and opportunities. More than a third of the participants felt university did not effectively prepare them for their career.
UAE	Rees et al. 2007.	Case study on Emiratisation in a UAE Petroleum company	Demonstrated the complexities in relation to management commitment, the role of expatriates in implementing the Emiratisations programs and the need to develop organizational change initiatives in relation to leadership at both national and organizational levels.
UAE	Randeree 2009	Document analysis	Challenges of Emiratisation. The research examines the success of the policy and its shortcomings. It discusses the public and private sector challenges, it offers notions and tools to foster nationalisation. In addition to the Human Resource Departments, policies established by the Ministry of Labour and governing bodies and the education systems have a major impact on Emiratisation.
UAE	Abdalla et al. 2010.	Use of profit model to estimate coefficients that indicated the probability that an individual in the UAE will work in the public sector relative to the private sector	They found two results, the first is high and the significant coefficient is the citizenship.
UAE	Forstenlechner & Mellahi 2011.	Analysis of survey data from 48 managers of MNE's in relation to Emiratisation	Sectors, where employment of host country nationals is taken for granted such as banking, are driven by a sense of appropriates and social legitimacy. Whereas other sectors are driven by the logic of economic efficiency.

UAE	Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner 2012.	Semi-structure interviews with 60 UAE citizens aged 18-23	Explored the factors determining career choice behaviour and the underlying career expectations and perceptions of young citizens. Authors found the main reasons for Emirati's resistance to work in the private sector were based on the structure of the Labour market, less favourable wages and employment conditions and a lack of exposure to the private sector.
UAE	Forstenlechner et al. 2012.	Surveyed - 250 UAE HRM personnel	Sought to determine the recruitment decisions of the employers and which factors are most significant and what contributed most to "internal resistance" to Emiratization. Found lack of vocational orientated motivation and the differing rights for employees contributed to the choice of employer. Recommended a supportive private sector internship program.
UAE	Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner 2014.	Interviews with 32 senior managers and HR professionals from various sectors of the economy	Study on the effectiveness of the Emiratization policy as practised over the past two decades along with major challenges encountered. Recommended a need to change regulations, policy tools and mechanism and parameters of compliance to ensure effective implementation of an Emiratization program and effective integration into the Labour market in both the public and private sectors.
UAE	Ryan 2015.	Theoretical inquiry of equity issues on Emiratization	An equity theory perspective on the perceptions of inequity that can exist in the comparison of employment of the UAE in the private and public sector. A well-integrated application of a variety of possible solutions can serve to support Emiratizations. Media campaigns highlighting the success stories of UAE nationals in the private sector, in addition, a combination of subtle enhancement to working conditions in conjunction to stricter controls in the government's generosity in the UAE public sector will help to reduce the disparity in benefits between the two.
UAE	Gulf Talent 2016.	Survey - 303 recent graduates who studied Engineering, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Business at American University of Sharjah (AUS).	All graduates perceived having relevant work experience is an important factor towards employability and having personal connections. Emirati graduates consider their command of English their top-selling point followed by their university's prestige and their academic grades.

UAE	Thompson & Wissink 2016.	Single case study and description research, documented analysis and the qualitative mode of inquiry to map historical information on the UAE	Research on the UAE's Emiratization or Labour nationalist policies found that there a number of systemic and structural barriers that have hampered the successful implementation of government policies in both the private and public sectors.
UAE	Jarrar 2018.	Surveyed 507 senior business executives, in-depth interviews with employers and policy leaders.	The nation requires a focus on the 'Future Skills', a need for employers to engage in dialogue with educational authorities and institutions, need to focus on learning STEM subjects and improving English proficiency.

In summary, this chapter focussed on investigating the theory relevant to the research questions including the current empirical literature both globally as well as specifically to the region. This chapter also discussed the complexity of employability and its impact on stakeholders. It discussed the skill underutilisation theory and how it relates to the human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory and the two-tiered labour system. It explained the employability issues whilst also discussing global employability models. It discussed global research concerning the employer's needs as well as the role of higher education in developing employability skills and employability in the context of the UAE, the challenges and finally, the current initiatives towards improved graduate employment.

Guilbert et al. (2016) advise the main perspectives on employability include education, government, the employer and the graduate. All are not exclusive however, all interrelate. Governments seek to achieve maximum employment, while employers pursue the best match for their needs and individuals strive to fulfil their career ambitions. Jarrar (2018) recommended

policy conversations between government, employers and educational institutions to develop the strategies leading to an increase in portable skills for graduates, a greater focus on English and Arabic, improvement in communication skills, promotion of innovative thinking, educational technology knowledge and a desire for life-long learning. Finally, the goal should be to develop an environment that nurtures sustained communication between the employer and education working collaboratively to ensure that students can become more "work-ready" and have practical, relevant experiences necessary for the current and future workplace.

The UAE government, Emirati and UAE graduates all require employment so they can successfully contribute to the UAE economy and become productive members of UAE society. HEIs need to work collaboratively with both employers and students to ensure that graduates have the necessary skills and work readiness to become successfully employed. However, there is a lack of research on the employer's perception of current and future skills and work-readiness of the UAE graduate and whether or not the strategies HEIs use to develop UAE Graduate employability are supportive. The following chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study and it will include an explanation of the participants, instruments, material, procedure and analysis methods.

Chapter III: Methodology

This research investigates employers' attitudes and perceptions concerning their primary decision-making influences when deciding to employ graduates from UAE Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A more informed understanding of this phenomenon provides (HEIs) with a more enlightened outlook regarding the preparation of UAE graduates for employment. This chapter describes the methodology undertaken during this research, the rationale for the research strategy, the description of the research sample, the participant selection process, the information required from respondents, an overview of research design, the methods of data collection, the analysis and synthesis of data, the ethical considerations, the issues of trustworthiness and finally, the limitations of the study.

Research Worldview

A pragmatic philosophical approach was adopted for this study as it seeks to focus primarily on inquiry. Pragmatism is a philosophical belief system developed in the 20th century from works by Charles Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), John Dewey (1859-1952), and George Mead (1863-1931), who collectively suggested that consideration of the practical effects of the information gathered would provide answers to the questions posed. They also advised that thought or knowledge may be used to predict or to solve a problem or, where necessary, provide reasons to act (Buchler 1939). More recent authors on Pragmatism such as Biessta & Burbules, (2003); Green (2007); Hesse-Biber (2015) and Patton (2015) as cited by Leavy (2017) combined their views concluding that they had no allegiance to a particular theory or tool in relation to research questions. The Pragmatist focuses on the outcome rather than how the outcome is achieved, they support their findings using both quantitative and qualitative research in whichever

sequence is most appropriate. The research questions guide the inquiry and link all practical actions arising from the study's findings. Solving the problem or identifying practical solutions to the matters raised should be the focus rather than esoteric philosophising over the findings themselves (Leavy 2017).

This inquiry is based upon the concept that collecting data from various sources provides a more complete response to the research questions rather than using one specific approach to arrive at a conclusion (Creswell 2014).

Research Design

A mixed-method approach was initially employed for this study using the convergent parallel mixed method system where the researcher unites both quantitative and qualitative data to build a comprehensive picture of the research problem (Creswell 2014). The convergent parallel approach requires the concurrent collection of both qualitative and quantitative data and the assimilation of information obtained leading towards an understanding of the results and the formation of conclusions. Contradictions or peculiarities identified by the data obtained may determine the need for further research so that a more complete understanding of the questions objectives can be secured whilst providing a snapshot of the current situation at the time of the research (Johnson & Christensen 2017). Although as the study evolved the data used was purely qualitative.

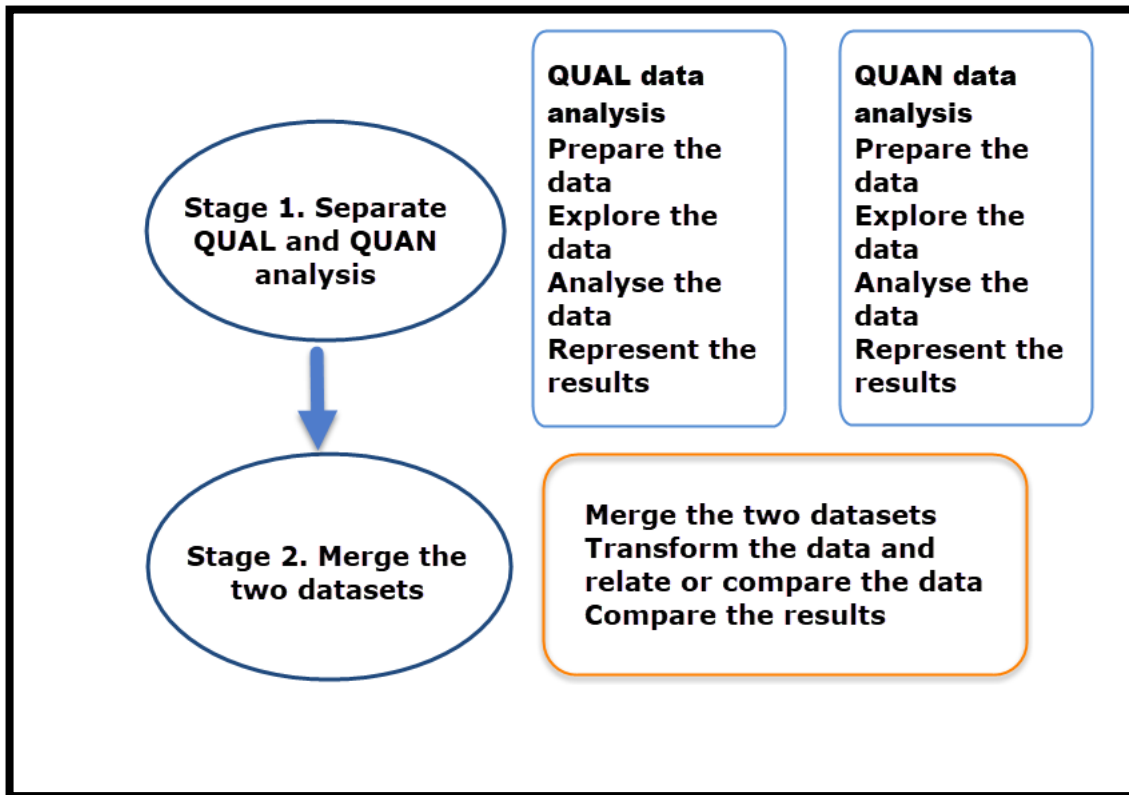
Quantitative (QUAN) research is useful in discovering “what happened” whilst Qualitative (QUAL) research delves into the “why and how it happened”. Quantitative research focuses on how variables interact or how they are influenced by different factors and whether there is a specific relationship between the variables whilst quantitative research looks for patterns and correlation between the numbers generated by the research. It also uses an exploratory scientific method to

generate a deeper understanding of the problem or situation presented by the research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012).

This study sought to employ these research methods to investigate what influences an employer's decision when considering UAE graduates for employment. Negligible research has been undertaken in this area previously when looking at the problem from the employer's perspective. The study commenced by collecting data from employers to ascertain the process undertaken when considering whether or not to hire a UAE graduate and what influences the employers' final decision. This portion of the investigation was undertaken using qualitative research. Concurrently, quantitative research by survey was undertaken to verify if the findings could be validated. As displayed below in Figure 5 titled "Convergent parallel Mixed Methods, the process of convergent or concurrent design uses both quantitative and qualitative data to cross-validate and compare the findings (Leavy 2017). The data is collected concurrently analysed, separately, the results merged, and the combined results interpreted (Creswell 2014).

Figure 5: Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods

(Ref: adapted from Umer Khalid – Mixed Method Data (2019))



Collins, Onwueqbuzie & Sutton (2006) advised that the Convergent Parallel Mixed Method approach allows the researcher to develop and expand on a particular theory by delving into the reasons behind the event or incident. The challenge, however, is that an extensive level of expertise is required in both quantitative and qualitative research if both approaches are to be undertaken concurrently. There may also be differences in samples and sizes which contribute to contradictions in results.

To overcome these impediments a pragmatic philosophical position was adopted using methods that best-suited situations as encountered (Johnson & Christensen 2014). This research focused on an approach that provided the most complete answers to the research questions. Methods, techniques and procedures that complemented and improved the quality of data collection were used. The qualitative approach was undertaken to assist the researcher to better understand the

concept of employability from the employer's perspective whilst the quantitative approach was employed to verify the data with a larger sample. The study looked at the concept of employability and the complex circumstances that influence an employer's decision to hire, whether they be the candidate's qualifications, experience, cultural or economic differences. This study sought to investigate those factors that are more influential and important to the employer's decision-making process and which factors need to be addressed by HEIs to improve the employability of UAE graduates.

Research Population, Participants and Sampling

The research candidates were comprised of UAE Employers and staff from UAE Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as the research questions aimed to ascertain the employer's perception of the preparedness of UAE graduates for the workforce and the actions to be implemented by UAE HEIs to improve the attractiveness of graduates to employers.

Employer Sample

Employer Interviews

In reference to research questions, RQ2 & 3 concerning employers views regarding graduate employability the sample of employers interviewed was drawn from UAE based businesses. All enterprises in the UAE are required to be registered with the Chamber of Commerce in the Emirate in which they primarily transact business. The current number of enterprises registered in the three emirates involved in this research study are detailed in Table 2 below titled "Business Licenses by Emirate 2017".

Table 2: Businesses Licenses by Emirate 2017

Emirate	Renewed	New	Total
Dubai	35066	5036	40102
Abu Dhabi	40884	4955	45839
Sharjah			17003 (2015)
			102,944

Source: Dubai, Abu Dhabi & Sharjah statistics centre

There is currently in excess of one hundred thousand businesses registered in the three largest emirates of the UAE, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The respondents to be canvassed in this study include businesses registered with the respective Chambers of Commerce in each Emirate. Each Chamber has the names, titles and contact details for all enterprises that currently hold a business licence in the UAE.

The process of stratified sampling was adopted to obtain in-depth interviews with employers to ensure that there was full representation across all twelve (12) UAE Industry sectors. Stratified sampling specifies the characteristics of the population of interest and locates individuals with those characteristics (Johnson & Christensen 2017). The sampling is a non-random sampling technique and was undertaken when choosing businesses in all twelve (12) UAE Industry sectors as displayed in Table 3 titled “UAE Industry sectors”.

Table 3: UAE Industry Sectors

Sector Number	UAE Industry Sector
1.	Government services and public administration
**2.	Community, health, and social services
**3.	Business, administration, and financial services
**4.	Tourism, hospitality, retail, and leisure services including personal care services
5.	Art, culture and entertainment
6.	Education, learning and social development
*7.	Building & construction, estates and assets development and management
*8.	Utilities & infrastructure (including telecommunications), electricity, engineering services, gas, science and mathematics, utilities support and water
*9.	Energy resources – oil, natural gas, petrochemical, chemical and mining/quarrying, renewable & sustainable energy
*10.	Manufacturing, design and innovation manufacturing, process and assembly manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology
*11.	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing
12.	Agriculture, livestock & fishery

Note: * are the key sectors the government expects growth (Ministry of Presidential Affairs/ NQA, pp. 2012), ** are the secondary sectors that expect growth.

These industry sectors are described in both the Occupations & Careers Handbook for UAE Nationals 2012 developed by the National Qualifications Authority (QfEmirates 2018) as well as in the UAE 2030 Vision document. The twelve (12) industry sectors reflect and are representative of the broader UAE demographic in terms of UAE key economic indicators (United Arab Emirates Yearbook 2008).

The aim of the study was to interview a minimum of two (2) employers in each sector to ensure a representative sample. Table 4 titled “Employer interviews by UAE Industry Sector” displays the actual number of employers interviewed in each of the twelve sectors.

Table 4: Employer Interviews by UAE Industry Sector

Sector Number	UAE Industry Sector	Code
1.	Government services and public administration	E10, E19
**2.	Community, health, and social services	E4, E20
**3.	Business, administration and financial services	E7, E11, E12, E13, E16
**4.	Tourism, hospitality, retail and leisure services including personal care services	E1, E6, E23
5.	Art, culture and entertainment	E17, E24
6.	Education, learning and social development	E8, E25, E28
*7.	Building & construction, estates and assets development and management	E2, E15
*8.	Utilities & infrastructure (including telecommunications), electricity, engineering services, gas, science and mathematics, utilities support and water.	E5, E9
*9.	Energy resources – oil, natural gas, petrochemical, chemical and mining/quarrying, renewable & sustainable energy	E22, E27
*10.	Manufacturing, design and innovation manufacturing, process and assembly manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology	E14, E21
*11.	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing	E3, E18, E26
12.	Agriculture, livestock & fishery	E29, E30

Note: * are the key sectors the government expects growth (Ministry of Presidential Affairs/ NQA, p.25 2012), ** are the secondary sectors that expect growth.

Effort was taken to secure a comprehensive spread of enterprises operating in the UAE, GCC and internationally to ensure that a broad spectrum of information was gathered. The use of stratified sampling enabled the category of ownership of the enterprise to be grouped by Government, Semi-government and Public (non-government) which facilitated a better understanding of whether the type of ownership and business location affected employers' perceptions when assessing UAE graduates for employment positions. Table 5 titled "Employer Interview Summary" specifies each employer interviewed by their business location, UAE industry sector, the Emirate in which they currently operate as well as their form of ownership category.

Table 5: Employer Interview Summary

Code	UAE, GCC or International	UAE Industry Sector	Emirates operating	Public or Private
E1	UAE & International	Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Leisure (4)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E2	UAE & International	Building & Construction, Estates & Assets Development (7)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E3	UAE & International	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing (11)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E4	UAE & International	Community, Health & Social Services (2)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E5	UAE & International	Utilities & Infrastructure, electricity, Engineering, Utilities & Water (8)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E6	UAE	Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Leisure (4)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (75% Government)
E7	UAE	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (100% Government)

E8	UAE & International	Education, Learning & Social Dev. (6)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E9	UAE & International	Utilities & Infrastructure, electricity, Engineering, Utilities & Water (8)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E10	UAE	Government Services & Public Admin (1)*	Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah	Government
E11	UAE, GCC & International	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	All	Public (60% Government)
E12	UAE & International	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E13	UAE & International	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E14	UAE, GCC & International	Manufacturing, Design & Innovation (10)*	Dubai	Public (International)
E15	UAE, GCC & International	Building & Construction, Estates & Assets Development (7)*	Dubai	Public (International)
E16	UAE & GCC	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah	Private
E17	UAE	Art, Culture & Entertainment (5)*	All	Private
E18	UAE, GCC & International	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing (11)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E19	UAE	Government Services & Public Admin (1)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E20	UAE	Community, Health & Social Services (2)*	Abu Dhabi & Sharjah	Private
E21	UAE	Manufacturing, Design & Innovation (10)*	Abu Dhabi	Private

E22	UAE	Energy Resources - Oil, Gas, Renewable & Sustainable Energy (9)*	Abu Dhabi & Sharjah	Private
E23	UAE	Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Leisure (4)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E24	UAE	Art, Culture & Entertainment (5)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E25	UAE	Education, Learning & Social Dev. (6)*	All	Government
E26	UAE & International	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing (11)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E27	UAE & GCC	Energy Resources - Oil, Gas, Renewable & Sustainable Energy (9)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Government
E28	UAE & International	Education, Learning & Social Dev. (6)*	Dubai	Private
E29	UAE	Agriculture, Livestock & Fishery (12)*	Abu Dhabi	Private
E30	UAE	Agriculture, Livestock & Fishery (12)*	Dubai	Public

* UAE Industry Sector Number

Employer Surveys

The register from the Abu Dhabi and Dubai Chamber of commerce which lists the names, title, and contact details of more than one hundred thousand registered businesses was used to invite business enterprises to complete a survey questionnaire on the topic of UAE graduate employability. Systematic Sampling of the registry was used which required the selection of every

tenth name on the register after the selection of a random starting point. The aim of systematic sampling is to generalize the sample population using a systematic survey sample data approach.

Using Fowlers (2009) table nominating a margin of error of +/-4%, a 95% confidence error and the probability that only 50% of the samples produce useable research this survey endeavoured to achieve a completed sample size of 500 useful responses. However, if only 384 fully completed usable responses had been received then that would have proved to be an adequate minimum sample size according to Johnson & Christensen, (pp. 271, 2017).

Higher Education Institution's Sample

In reference to research question RQ1 concerning educational institutions and the initiatives that they are currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability, a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews was conducted to ascertain their views on the matter. The staff involved included career development specialists, work placement specialists, industry partnership specialists, teaching faculty and curriculum development specialists. Additionally, interviews and focus groups were also conducted with Alumni to validate the perspective of the HEIs responses.

The sampling method, referred to as convenience sampling, enlisted the assistance of people who were readily available, volunteered, or could be easily recruited (Johnson & Christensen 2017).

The UAE has more than one hundred (100) HEIs affiliated to universities across the world offering many different educational programs (KHDA 2014).

Table 6 titled "Summary of HEI Data Collection" displays the details relating to the eleven (11) in-depth interviews and four focus groups conducted. This sample covered ten different HEIs.

Table 6: Summary of HEI Data Collection

Classification	Type of data	Code	Description	UAE/GCC or International	Emirates operating in
Career & Work Placement Specialists	Five (5) in-depth semi-structured interviews	IC1-5	Career Advisor, Work Placement Coordinator Alumni Manager, Manager of Career & Work placement	UAE	All UAE
HEI Faculty	Three (3) in-depth semi-structured interviews	IF1-3	Teaching faculty and curriculum coordinators	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Al Ain
Alumni	Three (3) in-depth semi-structured interviews	AI1-3	Unemployed and employed	UAE	Abu Dhabi
Employers & Universities	Focus Group	FEE1	Two (2) Employers & three (3) Universities	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Ras Khaimah, Sharjah
Career Guidance Personnel	Focus Group	FCG1	Four (4) Universities	UAE / International	Abu Dhabi, Dubai
Alumni	Focus Group	FA1-3	Eleven (11) Alumni - employed, unemployed and have their own businesses	UAE	Abu Dhabi
Employers, HEIs, government & Youth Council	Focus Group	FGEH1	Seven (7) assorted representatives	UAE	Abu Dhabi & Dubai

Information Required

This study required the collection of Perceptual Information from all participants which was uncovered in interviews and focus groups by asking participants to describe their experiences related to UAE graduate employability. In relation to the information required from the employer participant, it was important to understand what influenced the employer’s decision to employ, what was perceived as important and unimportant by the employer participant and whether they were satisfied with their employment decisions. It was noted that all the participants gave their views based on their own world view or frame of reference therefore, it was important to cross-reference and triangulate this information with the views of other participants.

Table 7 titled “Overview of Information Required” summarises what information the researcher needed to be collected during the in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups and surveys.

Table 7: Overview of Information Required

Type of Information Questions	What the Researcher Requires
Perceptual	Participant’s description and explanations of their experiences as this relates to the phenomenon
RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?	<p>What do HEIs do currently to prepare students for employment on graduating?</p> <p>What initiatives are HEIs undertaking to improve UAE graduate employability?</p> <p>Are graduating students currently employable? Why?</p> <p>What do you perceive the future employers may require to improve employability?</p>
RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the	<p>What do the employers suggest HEIs do to ensure the future UAE graduates are work-ready?</p> <p>What changes do employers recommend HEIs make to ensure the future UAE graduates are work-ready?</p>

employability of UAE graduates?	<p>Are employers satisfied with the work experience of graduates or how could HEIs develop the work experience for the potential graduate?</p> <p>Do the employers perceive that the current work placement is effective? What makes it effective or how could it be more effective?</p>
RQ3. What are the main influences for employer's when deciding to employ UAE graduates?	<p>Information relating to whether or not they have employed a UAE Graduate before, what they considered important, why?</p> <p>What influenced the decision to hire or not?</p> <p>What specific skills and work-readiness competencies do they see as most important?</p> <p>Do graduates have the required skills? Were they work ready or did they need more training? What training?</p> <p>In relation to the future, what skill and work-readiness competencies to they expect will be most important for their enterprise?</p> <p>What changes do they foresee will be required by the workforce in the future?</p>

Demographic information was collected to ensure a representative sample of the population was surveyed however further research was planned to fill gaps in the cross-section of respondent representation should they appear.

Research Overview

The use of multiple methods of data collection was necessary to achieve validation of the information whilst obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being observed. The methods employed included interviews, focus groups and online surveys whilst the design of the research remained flexible and allowed for modifications and changes to be made during the process of data collection. Appendix A, titled “Research Data Collection Plan and Modifications” summarises the steps undertaken during the data collection process and the modifications made to the plan. A detailed discussion of each of the data collection processes is discussed further in this chapter.

A conceptual framework was developed from the literature review which was used to guide each of the phases of research, especially data collection, analysis and interpretation. The continuation of the literature review during data collection and beyond generated fresh insights and provided supporting evidence as the study progressed. However, the negligible response to surveys was not anticipated and necessitated additional in-depth interviews and focus groups to ensure that enough material was available for analysis and validation.

Data Collection Methods

Different approaches to the collection of qualitative research data are available such as observations, interviews, document reviews, and focus groups and the researcher is aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each medium (Johnson & Christensen 2017). Due to the ease of accessibility and the ability to achieve a richness of data from the proposed participants the collection approach employed included in-depth interviews, focus groups and surveys, undertaken concurrently.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured using questions that were developed guided by the three main research questions. Table 8 titled “Semi-Structured Interview Questions” lists the questions posed in the interviews. The structure of the interviews comprised broad, flexible semi-structured questions with a mix of less structured interview questions (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015) to guide the interview whilst the concepts to be addressed related to the theoretical model discussed in the framework. All interviews took approximately 60 minutes.

Table 8: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Research Questions		
<p>RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?</p>	<p>RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates?</p>	<p>RQ3. What are the main influences for employer’s when deciding to employ UAE graduates?</p>
<p>Please describe your institution, what does it teach? How many students do you have who graduate each year, what differentiates you from other HEIs?</p> <p>In relation to graduate employability, what do you perceive you do well?</p> <p>Would you suggest your graduating students are work-ready?</p> <p>What does your institution currently do to prepare students to become work-ready?</p> <p>Which areas do you feel could be improved to make the students more work-ready?</p>	<p>Are you content with the standard of UAE graduates you have met or considered to employ?</p> <p>What changes do you suggest HEIs make to help graduates become more employable?</p> <p>What could HEIs do to ensure the future UAE graduates are work-ready?</p> <p>What are HEIs doing well, in relation to preparing UAE graduates for employment?</p>	<p>Previous employment of UAE Graduates</p> <p>Have you employed a UAE HEI Graduate before?</p> <p>What did you consider as important when employing the graduate?</p> <p>Did they have the skills you required?</p> <p>Were they work-ready or did they require further training?</p> <p>If so what training was required?</p> <p>What further skills would have been beneficial for your organisation?</p> <p>Do you provide further training for all new staff? If so what is it?</p> <p>If only for graduates why do you think it is specifically required for them?</p>
<p>How do you work with industry to ensure the graduates have the skills, competencies and experience to be relevant, work-ready and employable?</p>	<p>Are there approaches that HEIs could do with the employers to improve UAE graduates employability?</p> <p>What do you recommend?</p> <p>What would you like to do with the HEIs to improve graduate employability?</p>	<p>Specific Work Skills & Work-readiness</p> <p>Currently, what specific skills and work-readiness competencies to you see as most important?</p> <p>Do you have general specific skills and work readiness</p>

		<p>competencies for all jobs? If so, what are they?</p> <p>Are there specific skills and work readiness competencies for specific jobs? If so, what are they?</p> <p>In relation to the future, what skill and work-readiness competencies to you expect will be most important for your company?</p> <p>Regarding the future. What skills and work-readiness competencies do you perceive would be most important during the next year?</p> <p>What about the next two years?</p> <p>What about in five years' time?</p>
<p>What effect do you perceive the changes to the international student visa will have at your institution?</p>	<p>Are you aware of the HEI work placement programs?</p> <p>Is work placement effective for the employer?</p> <p>What makes it effective or how could it be more effective?</p>	<p>The Employment decision</p> <p>When deciding to employ any new staff what are the factors you consider?</p>
<p>What do you perceive the future employers could do to ensure UAE graduates are employable?</p>		<p>Future workforce requirements</p> <p>What changes do you foresee will be required by the workforce in the future?</p>

A pilot interview with an employer was conducted using a recording device. The interview was reviewed to ascertain where the approach could be improved upon. It was noted that the employer was time-sensitive therefore the pace of the interviews would need to be adjusted depending on whether the interviewee appeared relaxed or anxious about the time. A further observation

included the consent form which the interviewee was reluctant to sign. The researcher discussed the matter with the doctoral supervisor who recommended that the researcher be confident, forthright and relaxed when requesting the consent document be signed. This approach resulted in minimal refusals however the interview was politely terminated if the interviewee objected to signing the consent form.

The interview plan required participants to be contacted either by email or phone and asked whether they would agree to a meeting so that the researcher could learn about their approach to recruiting UAE graduates. If agreed, the researcher would forward an outline of questions together with a consent form to the interviewee and, where possible, ask for the consent form to be returned prior to the interview however most consent forms were signed at the meeting prior to its commencement. The process of arranging the interviews proved time-consuming and the researcher was often sent to many different managers for approvals prior to an interview taking place. Whilst interviewees were comfortable with anonymity and happy to discuss employment processes most showed reluctance when signing the consent form. A previous researcher Hawamdeh & Raigangar (2014) also encountered challenges when asking Arab participants to sign a written consent form as this inferred a lack of trust in their word due to a different value system to the Western model. Hawamdeh & Raigangar (2014) suggested it may be considered an insult to ask someone to sign a form after he or she has given verbal approval. For this study, a signed consent form was completed for each interview prior to the interview commencing. No interviews proceeded unless the consent form was signed. The information and interview consent forms forwarded to employers are displayed in Appendix B.

All interviews with participants were semi-structured whilst the length of the interview was determined by the interviewee’s time constraints and the richness of the responses to the questions (Gubrium & Holstein 2009). Establishing trust was important prior to beginning the interview and giving feedback about the information during the interview was also important (Hawamdeh & Raigar, 2014). Table 9 titled “Summary of interviews” details the number of interviews conducted.

Table 9: Summary Interviews

Classification	Type of data	Code	Description	UAE/GCC or International	Emirates operating in
Employers	Thirty (30) in-depth semi-structured interviews	E1-30	Employers across all 12 Industry sectors	Assorted	Assorted
Career & Work Placement Specialists	Five (5) in-depth semi-structured interviews	IC1-5	Career Advisor, Work Placement Coordinator Alumni Manager, Manager of Career & Work placement and Industry partnership specialists.	UAE	All UAE
HEI Faculty	Three (3) in-depth semi-structured interviews	IF1-3	Teaching faculty and curriculum coordinators	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Al Ain
Alumni	Three (3) in-depth semi-	AI1-3	Unemployed and employed	UAE	Abu Dhabi

	structured interviews				
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The primary advantage of interviews is that the researcher has control over the data collected. The interview can be held at a time convenient to the respondent, in an environment that is familiar to them and the questions can be personalised. Also, the response rate of useful information is high, the researcher has flexibility to probe for additional information and finally, it may be the only way to reach certain respondents. However, the disadvantages include an interview process that is time-consuming, requires permission to access the respondent, possibility of errors attributed to miscommunication and finally, technical equipment may not be working (Johnson & Christensen 2017).

Focus Groups

Focus groups were arranged at several HEIs concurrently with the interview process. The reason for the concurrent interviews and focus groups was to verify and compare the data collected in the interviews with the focus group data. Participants in the HEI focus groups included careers and work placement specialists, alumni managers, industry partnership specialists, teaching faculty and curriculum development specialists. Additional focus groups were also conducted with employers and alumni to obtain their perspective and compare the data with the interviews data. The purpose of the focus groups was to discuss the perception that staff held regarding graduate employability and to identify what HEI initiatives are currently in place to support UAE graduate employability. Examples of broad open-ended questions posed to the focus groups are included in Table 8 titled “Semi-Structured Interview Questions”. All focus group participants signed a consent form

agreeing to participate in the discussions whilst also agreeing to the session being recorded. Table 10 “Summary of Focus Groups” displays the cross-section of participants.

Table 10: Summary of Focus Groups

Classification	Type of data	Code	Description	UAE/GCC or International	Emirates operating in
Employers & Universities	Focus Group	FEE1	Two (2) Employers & three (3) Universities	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Ras Khaimah, Sharjah
Career Guidance Personnel	Focus Group	FCG1	Four (4) Universities	UAE / International	Abu Dhabi, Dubai
Alumni	Focus Group	FA1-3	Eleven (11) Alumni - employed, unemployed and have their own businesses	UAE	Abu Dhabi
Employers, HEIs, government & Youth Council	Focus Group	FGEH1	Seven (7) assorted representatives	UAE	Abu Dhabi & Dubai

The focus groups not only provided in-depth information in a relatively short period of time they also provided a broad spectrum of information extremely useful to the study. Effort was expended to ensure that the sample of participants in the focus group was random, that all respondents participated equally and that the outcomes were not skewed by a minority (Johnson & Christensen 2017).

Recording of Data

A Sony Stereo Digital Voice Recorder ICD-UX560 was used to record all conversations. All recordings were uploaded via an inbuilt USB directly to the project computer file, a code assigned to the recordings, and transcription commenced immediately. A copy of the recording was kept on a backup computer and identified with codes; no names were attached. The consent forms were also identified with code names and filed separately in a locked cabinet.

Preservation of Confidentiality & Anonymity

A record was kept of all interviewees and attendees at focus groups and a code assigned to each participant. This record was kept separately and securely from the coded papers and the transcriptions to ensure both confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. No names were used in transcripts, only codes. All Employers interviews were coded E1 to E30. All HEI interviews were coded based on their areas of speciality, for example, Career Specialists, Work Placement, Alumni Managers and Industry Partnerships were classified under the heading careers IC1 to IC5, Faculty were classified as IF1 to IF3, Alumni interviews were coded as IA 1 to IA3. All focus groups were coded F for Focus Group and FE for Employers, FA for Alumni and FC for Career Specialists.

Surveys

During the quantitative phase, the study aimed to collect 500 surveys however more would have been ideal if possible. The survey was based on a modified survey that has been conducted in twenty-seven (27) European countries with over seven thousand (7000) interviewees (Gallup Organisation 2010). This tool was used as it has proven to be valid and reliable.

The survey instrument was divided into five sections; Section 1 included background questions on the employer, their industry, whether they have employed graduates in the last five years or plan to in the following five years. Section 2 discussed what factors influence the decision to employ a UAE graduate. Section 3 focused on the graduates, how many are employed in the company and what qualifications they have, whilst section 4 specifically related to graduate employability, focusing on degree subject knowledge, work, life experience, generic skills and emotional intelligence. Additionally, section 4 asked questions relating to recruitment decisions concerning why graduates are employed and which decisions are most important to the employer. Section 5 investigated communication and cooperation with higher education institutions and what the employer recommends concerning improving the employability of graduates.

There have been modifications to the original survey so it required piloting. A pilot study of the Quantitative survey questionnaire was conducted with three different enterprises previously interviewed by the researcher who were happy to provide feedback. Three research education experts also gave feedback on the survey prior to conducting the research. The participants were asked to complete the survey. Once finished, the researcher asked the participants if each of the items was clear, if there was any data missing, or if they had any concerns with the questions. The researcher probed about their experience completing the questionnaire with questions such as “Was the questionnaire easy to complete?” Were there too many questions on the same topic? “Was the survey repetitive? Were the questions clear?” All changes were made as suggested. After completing the pilot test, the questions were revised and piloted again (Johnson & Christensen 2014). This second pilot was with two other enterprises.

Then the survey was ready to be released. The final survey that was used is available for viewing in Appendix C. Google forms was used and an email sent to each enterprise. This survey research used systematic sampling. The questionnaires gather information to understand the characteristics of a population based on the sample data. Systematic sampling was used due to the large number of enterprises available in the population and the researcher planned to be able to generalise the findings based on the data collected. The advantage of online surveys is that they inexpensive, the respondent can respond at any time and the researcher has control over the data collection setting. Although the disadvantages include a moderate to low response and it can take several weeks to send reminders while waiting for responses, surveys could be completed incorrectly or questions misunderstood whilst the researcher needs to deal with the data as it is received (Johnson & Christensen 2017).

This researcher had planned to work with each Chamber of Commerce to have the surveys placed on their websites and endorsed by the Chamber. This approach was used in Europe however unfortunately, the researcher was unable to gain approval to have the survey on the Chamber of Commerce websites. Therefore, the researcher sent the survey link with an introductory email (Appendix D) to each enterprise. Two follow up emails were sent as gentle reminders. The survey was sent to 1,433 respondents who were invited to complete the survey however the response was negligible. Therefore the survey data was not included in the research.

Unfortunately, gaining respondent participation in surveys in the Middle East is difficult (Hawamdeh & Raigangar 2014). Lages, Pfajfar & Shoham (2015) advise in their study three Middle East themes emerged – “general lack of trust in and suspicion about surveys, country-specific research design challenges and weak university-company links” they discussed the

suspicion of the survey [as an instrument] because the respondents were unfamiliar with the survey process. Another barrier discussed is “a need for personal contact” in the Middle East. Ryan & Ryan (2015) have perceived a challenge in conducting research in the UAE. They commenced research in 2015 to determine the drivers and barriers to effective research in the UAE. Their research involves online surveys to current scientific researchers working in UAE institutions and is yet to be published. Balakrishnan (2013) investigated the barriers to research in the UAE, one being the survey barriers, he cited an interview with an UAE regional banker who had sent out 45,000 questionnaires using the bank's current database and received 1,829 responses a 4% response rate. The research was over four months and a gift was used as an incentive for survey respondents. The 4% response rate is much lower than the Baruch & Holtom (2008) study that advised an average international global response rate from individuals is 52.7% and global response rates from organisations is 35.7%.

Hawamdeh & Raigangar (2014) advised that the most effective approach to gathering data in an “Arab setting” is to build a relationship with the participant so that they are more comfortable and forthcoming when being interviewed. Due to the lack of survey responses the quantity of interviews and focus groups was increased.

Data Analysis & Synthesis

All interviews and focus groups were recorded. On completion of the interview or focus group the researcher assigned a specific code and commenced transcribing the data. The researcher listened to the recording, typed the data and endeavoured to do this verbatim without any interpretation or prejudice. The data was then checked for errors and formatted to upload to NVivo 11. During the research period, NVivo released version 12 which negatively impacted the timeline for the research

however the new version had information management benefits expediting the processing of the data.

The analysis involved reviewing the data and re-reading the transcripts several times to gain clearness and understanding of the participants' views. This iterative process involved organising the data into themes. The researcher recorded themes in a codebook as the transcripts were read. The codes were based on a phrase or paragraph with a similar meaning. Initially, there were many codes however a mind map was developed to evaluate linkages, which strived to reduce the number of themes by adding related subthemes. Whilst continually rationalising whether the theme was relevant to the research questions (Saldana 2009).

NVivo 12 software made it easy to associate and manage themes whilst doing searches to ascertain the number of times a particular phrase was mentioned. The codes were sorted and assessed to check how they linked to the research questions. The participant coding facilitated analysis of the data. Once all transcripts had been coded NVivo 12 aided in the display of distinct trends in the data which are shown in Chapter IV of this study.

The data was analysed to confirm whether all research questions had been answered adequately or if further data was required. During this process, a point of saturation was achieved where several sources were making the same comments or similar. This data saturation suggested the sample size had been reached (Acharya et al. 2013; Fusch & Ness 2015).

In working towards the findings and conclusions the thematic analysis from the research was compared and contrasted with the literature review. Discussion on this is found in Chapter V. This cross-sectional study examined the current attitudes, beliefs, opinions (Creswell 2014) from UAE

employers and HEIs staff at one point of time and then compared them with the global literature. The information came from many different employers and HEIs and was validated through triangulation, a process of checking for consistency which reduces the potential bias of a single researcher who collected and analysed the data (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008).

Ethics Statement

An ethical approach was taken whilst conducting this research as the researcher has honest values and integrity, all precautions were considered whilst collecting, interpreting and working with the participants and data in this research. Prior to commencing the research, approval was sort from the British University in Dubai's Ethics Advisory Committee. A copy of the approved ethics consent form is available in Appendix E.

All participants were given a letter explaining the project objectives together with an informed consent form before they participated in the study. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality in writing. A copy of this form is in Appendix B. The original signed consent forms are in a locked filing cabinet. There was a minimal risk to participants who participated in this study as their information was securely stored, the transcripts of the interviews, focus groups and surveys remain confidential and are not accessible by anyone other than the researcher.

In relation to the in-depth interviews and focus groups, the participants were given a letter of consent and if the participants wished to view and verify the transcript of the interview/s or focus group the transcript/s were provided. The researcher encouraged the participants to view the transcript to verify the correctness of data and interpretation. Only a few participants requested a copy of the transcript of the interview and then when they received it they did not request to make any changes to the data provided.

All data collected was documented with honesty and integrity. The researcher endeavoured to report the details as accurately as possible, avoid plagiarism, draw an original conclusion and ensure appropriate professional behaviour was undertaken.

Research Validity & Trustworthiness

Guba & Lincoln (1998) proposed that an effective approach to evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research was to consider the credibility and dependability of the research. Transferability relates to whether or not the study can be replicated.

Credibility refers to whether the participant's perceptions match up with the researcher's portrayal of them. This researcher works at an HEI and, prior to the study, held personal views on the phenomenon to be examined however during the study the researcher endeavoured to focus on data collection and the views of the participants. The researcher recorded reflective field notes in a journal throughout the process and eliminated bias and interpretation by collecting data from multiple sources. The researcher interviewed Employers from different sectors and HEIs Alumni and HEI staff from different areas of the organisation in the search for variations in the understanding of the phenomenon and to uncover similar and contrary information.

Dependability refers to how the researcher tracked the process and procedures used to collect and interpret the data. This researcher has kept meticulous records at each stage of the process, asked questions of other more experienced researchers and verified the approaches to ensure they were dependable and valid.

When considering the validity or trustworthiness of the qualitative research the aim is to ensure it is plausible, credible, trustworthy and defensible. The general strategy to ensure this is to undertake

the triangulation approach to validate the data (Johnson & Christenson, 2017). This was undertaken by doing many interviews across many different sectors and HEIs and conducting focus groups with different employers and staff from different HEIs to collect data from diverse sources. The triangulation was using multiple investigator methods or data sources in search of convergence of results (Johnson & Christenson, 2017). The cross-checking of the information from multiple sources aided in a corroboration of the information.

A further consideration of trustworthiness relates to transferability or reliability which refers to whether a similar research process would work in other research settings or contexts. This researcher has strived to ensure that this study could be emulated by other researchers by carefully documenting in detail the approaches, stages and steps employed during the study.

Research Limitations

Regardless of how carefully planned the study, there are always limitations and constraints (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). One of the primary limitations of this study was the lack of response to the online survey forwarded to 1,433 employers. Research suggests that surveys conducted within the Middle East are generally fraught with trust issues and poor responses, however, having endorsement from a prominent legitimate organization such as a Chamber of Commerce may have assisted in gathering the required number of survey responses.

This lack of quantitative data prevented the research from undertaking a statistical representation requiring the study to be comprised of perspective-based qualitative research only. This changed the research approach from one of convergent mixed methods to a purely qualitative research-based study. The perspectives were taken from a broad spectrum of sources including Employers,

HEIs & Alumni, however, the researcher is aware of the danger that interpretation of data may become subjective if factual data is not relied upon.

Summary

This chapter provides a detailed description of the study's research methodology including a review of the current literature conducted prior to developing a conceptual framework for the design and analysis of the study. A convergent mixed-methods process was originally conceived for this study which, due to the lack of quantitative responses, evolved into a qualitative process that provided a wealth of relevant data. The qualitative study included representation from employers across all industry sectors and staff from ten (10) HEIs participating in forty-one (41) in-depth interviews and six (6) focus groups.

Analysis of the findings enabled key themes to be identified whilst comparisons with relevant literature enabled conclusions to be drawn and practical recommendations to be offered to Higher Education Institutions to improve current practice and influence future research. The intent of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the primary influences impinging on the employment of graduates in the UAE and how strategies can be developed to improve their employability in the future.

The following chapter will discuss the results and analysis relating to the information gathered in the research to identify the employer's perceptions of UAE graduates's employability and the current education processes HEIs are taking towards work readiness for graduate employability.

Chapter IV: Results & Analysis

Introduction

This study accumulated data suitable for addressing the following research questions concerning UAE Graduate Employability.

RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?

RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates?

RQ3. What are the main influences for Employer's when deciding to employ UAE graduates?

This chapter analyses the research information gathered across forty-one (41) in-depth interviews with Employers, Higher Educations Institutions (HEIs) and Alumni. Additionally, four supplementary focus groups were also conducted with the same entities. The in-depth interviews were comprised of thirty (30) semi-structured interviews administered with employers across twelve (12) different UAE Industry sectors as well as five (5) Career and Work placement specialists, three (3) faculty and three (3) alumni interviewed across ten (10) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Summary of Data Collected

The summary of data collection shown in Table 11 below titled 'Summary of Data Collection' collates the information obtained during interviews with Employers, HEIs and focus groups into various classifications to facilitate understanding of the analysis to follow. Further detail regarding the sector and location breakdown is contained in Appendix H.

Table 11: Summary of Data Collection

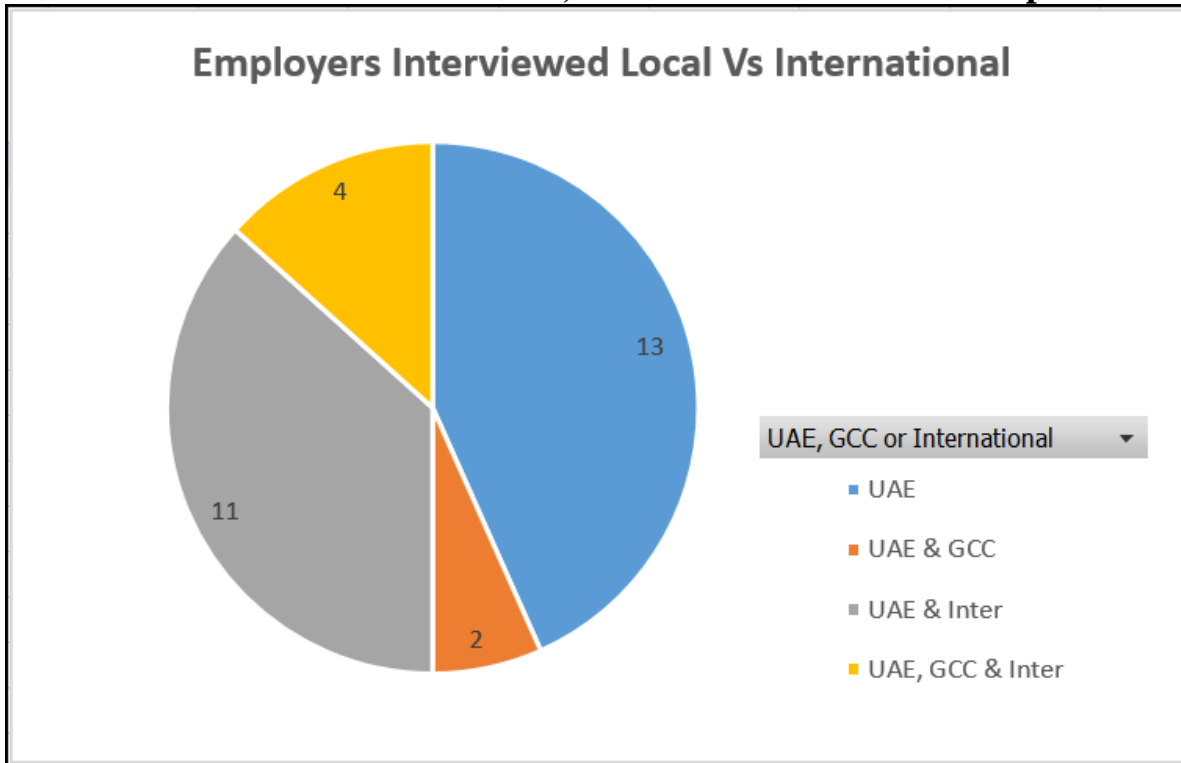
Classification	Type of data	Code	Description	UAE/GCC or International	Emirates operating in
Employers	Thirty (30) in-depth semi-structured interviews	E1-30	Employers across all 12 Industry sectors	Assorted	Assorted
Career & Work Placement Specialists	Five (5) in-depth semi-structured interviews	IC1-5	Career Advisor, Work Placement Coordinator, Alumni Manager, Manager of Career & Work placement	UAE	All UAE
HEI Faculty	Three (3) in-depth semi-structured interviews	IF1-3	Teaching faculty and curriculum coordinators	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Al Ain
Alumni	Three (3) in-depth semi-structured interviews	AI1-3	Unemployed and employed	UAE	Abu Dhabi
Employers & Universities	Focus Group	FEE1	Two (2) Employers & three (3) Universities	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Ras Khaimah, Sharjah
Career Guidance Personnel	Focus Group	FCG1	Four (4) Universities	UAE / International	Abu Dhabi, Dubai
Alumni	Focus Group	FA1-3	Eleven (11) Alumni - employed, unemployed and have their own businesses	UAE	Abu Dhabi

Employers, HEIs, government & Youth Council	Focus Group	FGEH1	Seven (7) assorted representatives	UAE	Abu Dhabi & Dubai
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Employer Location Distribution Analysis

A total of thirty employers were interviewed. The study ensured that an adequate spread of UAE, GCC and International enterprises were represented to facilitate the gathering of a broad spectrum of relevant information. Details regarding the employment sector and locations in which employers operate in the UAE can be found in Appendix H. Effort was employed to ensure a balance between UAE enterprises and those that operate not only in the UAE but internationally and across the GCC. The table 12 ‘Breadth of UAE, GCC & International Enterprises’ displays the distribution.

Table 12: Breadth of UAE, GCC & International Enterprises



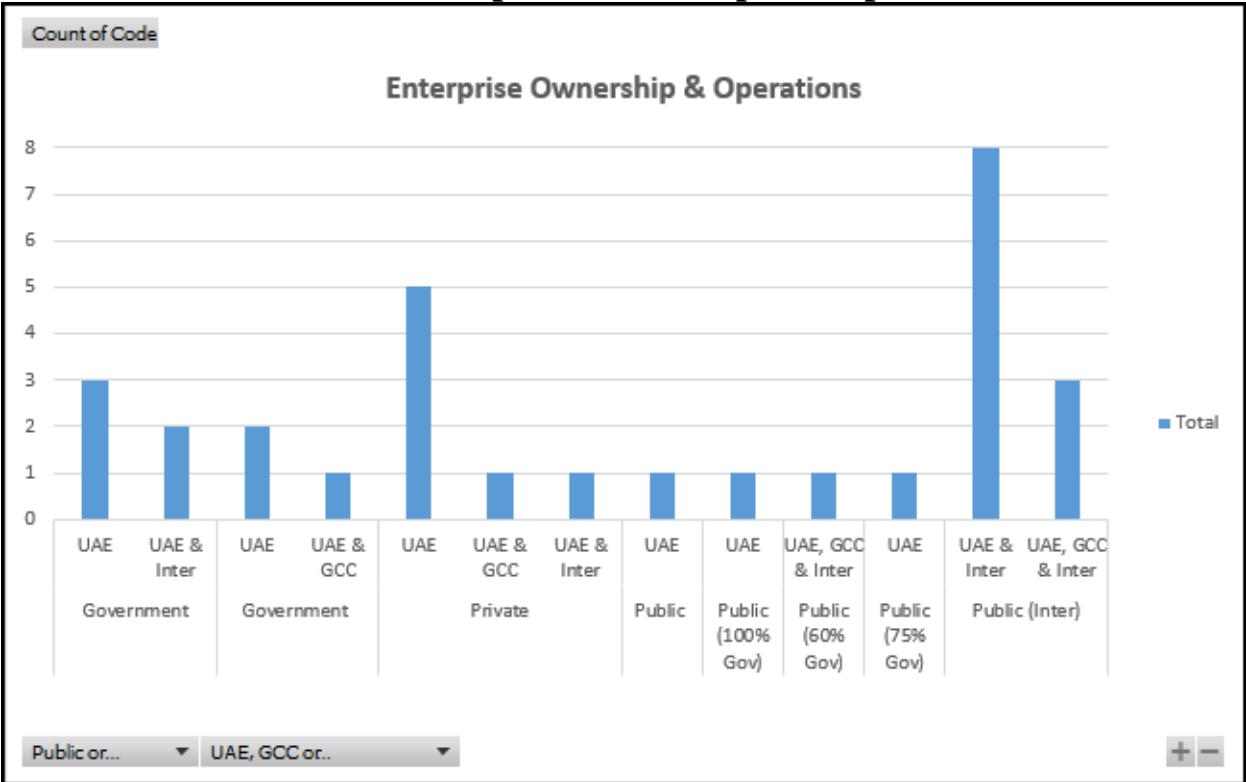
Most employers interviewed had businesses either solely in the UAE 43% or in the UAE & Internationally 37% while the balance either had businesses in the UAE, GCC and Internationally 13% or operated in the UAE and GCC only 7%.

The research also differentiated between government, semi-government and private/public company ownership to better understand if the type of ownership changed perceptions held by employers towards the selection of UAE graduates. It was appropriate therefore to ensure that all types of enterprises were adequately represented in the research.

Interviewees often referred to enterprises as either Public or Private however for the purposes of this study it is more appropriate to classify enterprises into three groups, Government, Semi-

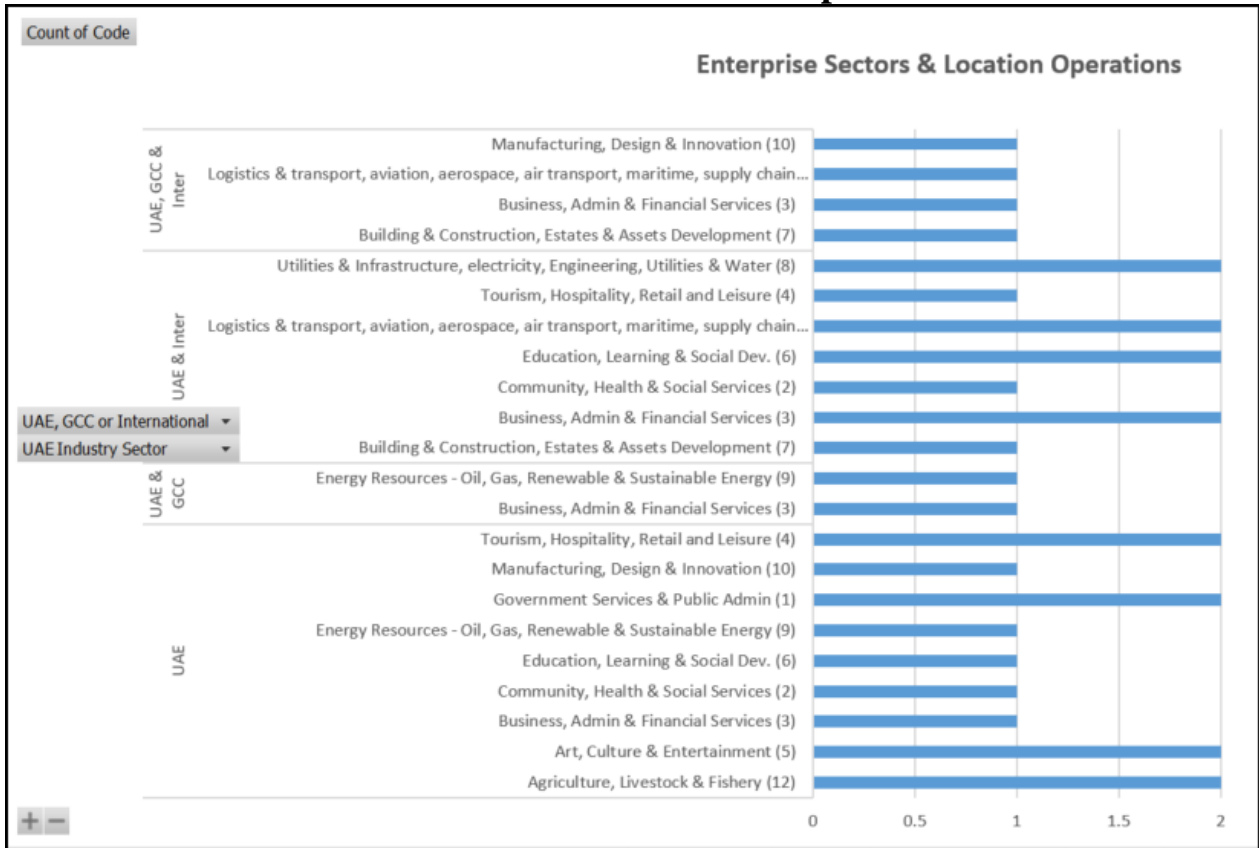
government or Public (non-government) enterprises. A List of Abbreviations has been provided at the beginning of the study for a more definitive classification on enterprise ownership. Table 13 below titled ‘Enterprise Ownership and Operations’ shows the distribution of employers relative to countries of operation.

Table 13: Enterprise Ownership and Operations



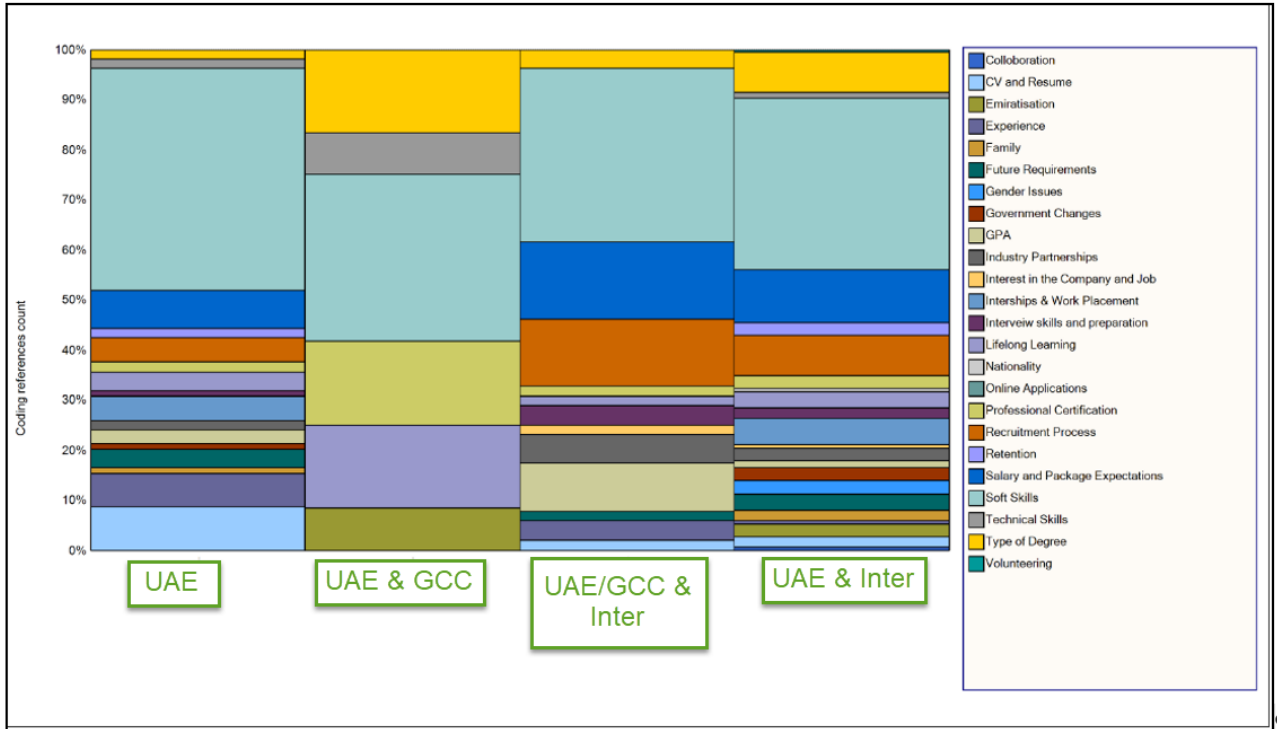
Employers representing businesses across all twelve (12) UAE Industry Sectors were interviewed to ensure that a wide representation of employment perceptions was gathered. These were correlated to countries of operation as displayed in Table 14 titled ‘Locations & Sectors Represented’ to identify more clearly differences arising from location.

Table 14: Locations & Sectors Represented



A matrix was also developed in NVivo 12 to analyse how often a relevant employment theme was raised and discussed with the aim of comparing and contrasting similarities and differences across each of the four country groupings in which each of the enterprises operated, UAE; UAE & GCC; UAE & International; and UAE, GCC and International.

Table 15: UAE, GCC & International Thematic Reference Matrix



The above Table 15 titled ‘UAE, GCC & International Thematic Reference Matrix’ identifies a series of recurring employment themes common to all businesses interviewed irrespective of their locations. The most outstanding of these include the importance of soft skills (light green), followed by the significance of the salary package (dark blue), the recruitment process (orange), the desire for life-long learning (pale purple), professional certification (fawn) and internships (light blue). For clarity, the percentage ranking for each of these themes is scheduled in Table 16 titled ‘Employer UAE/GCC & International Reference Matrix’ with a detailed analysis of each of these themes to be presented later in this chapter.

Table 16: Employer UAE/GCC & International Reference Matrix

	UAE	UAE & GCC	UAE/GCC & International	UAE & International
Soft skills	44%	33%	35%	34%
Salary Package	8%	-	15%	11%
Recruitment Process & CV	6%	-	16%	10%
Life-Long Learning & Desire to learn	-	17%	2%	3%
Professional Certification		17%	2%	3%
Internship & Work placement	5%	-	-	5%
Technical Skills	-	8%	-	1%
Industry partnerships	-	-	6%	3%
GPA	-	-	10%	-
Emiratization	-	8%	-	3%

In contrast to the above table, when the data was filtered for various industry sectors a different emphasis on work skills was identified. Table 17 titled ‘Industry Sector Reference Matrix’ analysed the emphasis based on sector. All industry sectors focussed on soft skills as most important then the majority of the sectors considered the recruitment process whereas the logistics and education sectors emphasised salary packages prior to the recruitment process. The Government and Logistics sectors nominated technical skills as the most important followed by life-long learning and the desire to learn.

Table 17: Industry Sector Reference Matrix

	Business **3	Govern. 1	Health **2	Art 5	Building *7	Utilities *8	Energy *9	Manufact. *10	Logistics *11	Education 6	Tourism **4
Soft skills	32%	15%	36%	27%	29%	30%	58%	39%	28%	37%	23%
Salary Package	8%	-	2%	-	-	4%	4%	7%	19%	26%	11%
Recruitment Process & CV	11%	8%	18%	23%	11%	15%	7%	14%	8%	4%	14%
Internship & Work placement	2%	23%	-	-	-	-	-	-	11%	-	3%
Technical Skills	-	15%	-	-	-	-	-	-	4%	-	-
Life-Long Learning & Desire to learn	-	16%	-	18%	-	-	8%	-	-	14%	-
Industry partnerships	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17%
Graduate Training Program	-	-	-	-	14%	15%	13%	-	-	-	-
Professional Certification	5%	-	-	-	14%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Type of Degree	-	8%	13%	-	14%	-	-	7%	-	-	-
Future Skills	-	-	-	9%	14%	-	-	7%	4%	-	-
Experience	-	-	7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6%
GPA	5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	7%	-	-	-
Emiratization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7%	-
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	6%	-	-	-	-	-

Refer to Appendix G for a full description of the 12 UAE Industry Sectors (NQA 2012).

Higher Education Institution Interviews

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with ten different HEIs including both Government and Private institutions across the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah to identify what they perceived as important in developing employable graduates. The interviewees in the HEIs included faculty, career specialists, work placement coordinators, curriculum coordinators and industry partnership specialists all focussed on graduate employment.

A matrix was developed in NVivo 12 which compares the emphasis that both Employers and Higher Education Institutions place on different employability themes. Table 18 titled ‘Comparison of thematic references between employers and HEIs’ provides a broad overview of the comparison between individual employers and HEIs and what they consider to be relevant to UAE graduate employability.

Table 18: Comparison of Thematic References between Employers & HEIs

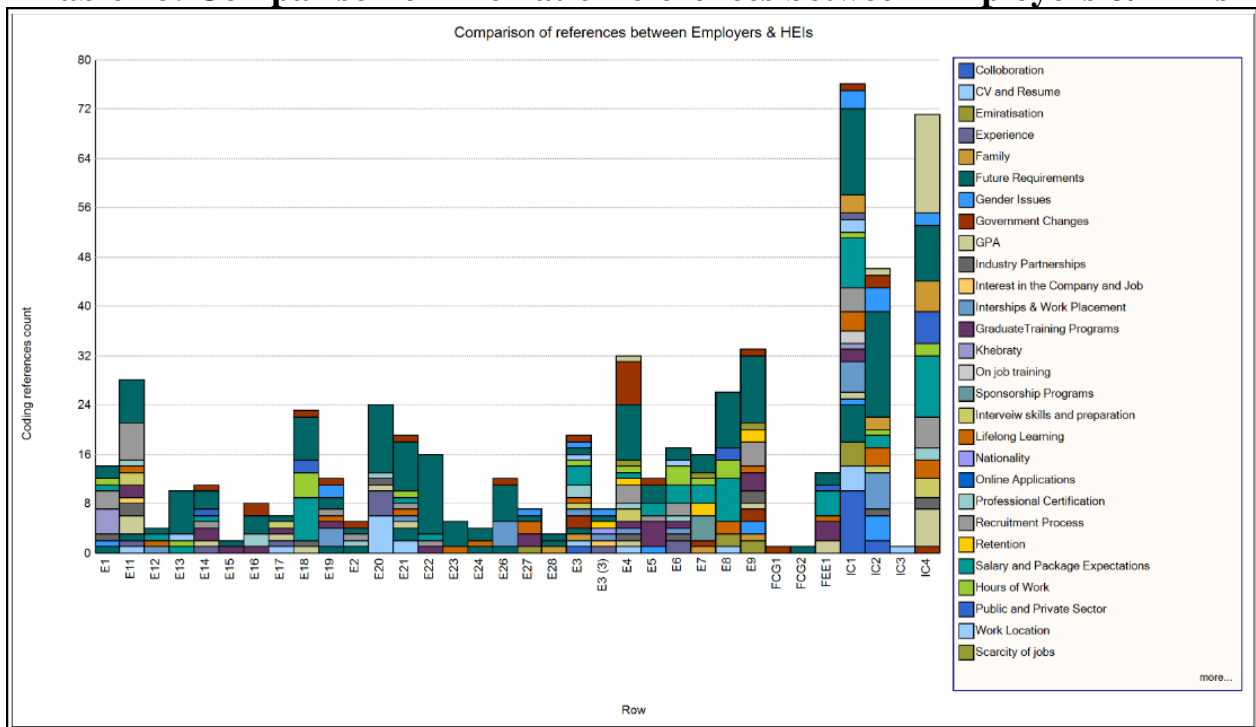
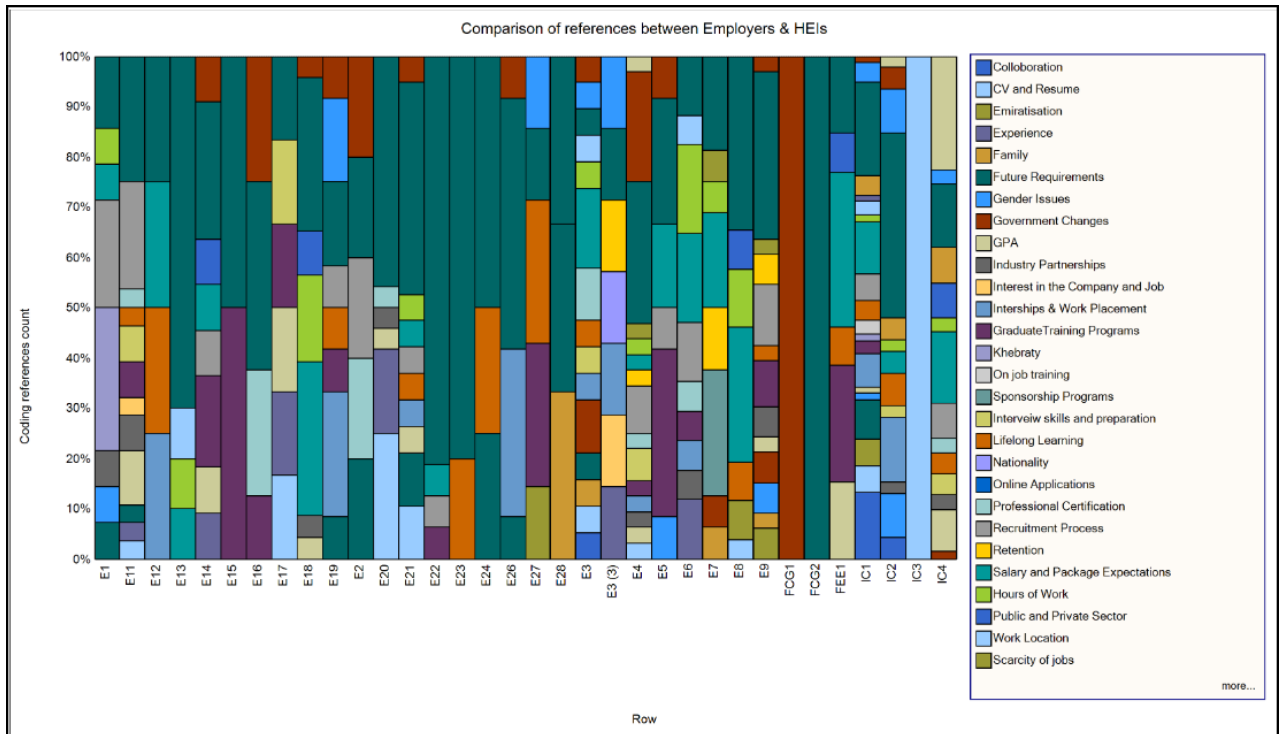


Table 19 titled ‘Percentage Comparison of Thematic references between Employers and HEIs’ refers to the percentage weighting that both the Employer and the HEIs allocates to each employability theme. The data confirms the differences between the employer and HEIs. While the HEIs are aware of the importance of soft skills and recruitment preparation to employability they are less aware of the importance that employers place upon lifelong learning and internships.

Table 19: Percentage Comparison of Thematic references between Employers & HEIs



Employers Views of Key Employment Themes.

Employment themes perceived to be important to employers when considering whether to hire a UAE graduate is discussed in the following section. These themes are discussed in order of importance as perceived by the employer however observations arising from HEIs and various focus groups are added where relevant. The interviews provided more in-depth data the focus groups often confirmed the data discussed in the interviews. Although occasionally there was a notable quote which is discussed in the following results. The benefit of undertaking interviews and focus groups were the ability to triangulate the data.

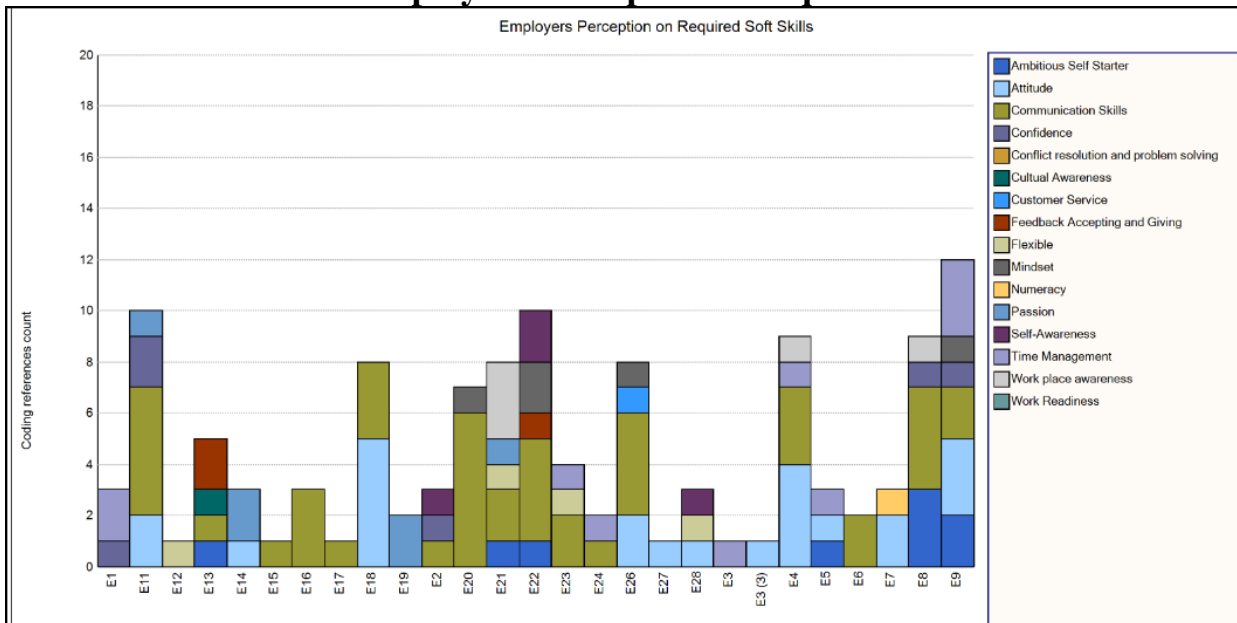
Soft Skills

All employers interviewed identified soft skills as the most important area of employability when hiring UAE Graduates. There was a broad consensus among employers when discussing soft skills

as to what the term included. These included the following in order of priority; Communications Skills, Attitude, Time Management, Passion, Self-Starter, Workplace Awareness, Confidence, Self-Awareness, the ability to give and accept Feedback, Flexibility and the ability to Problem Solve.

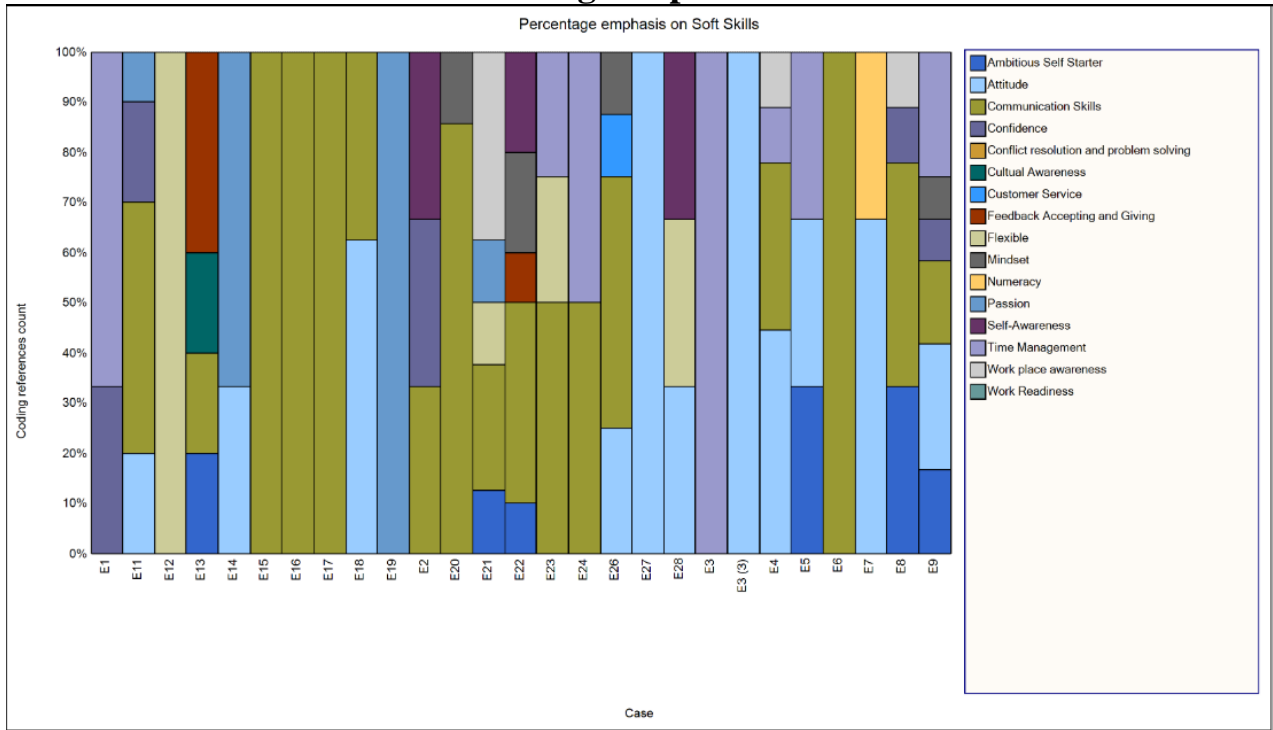
Table 20 below titled ‘Employers Perception of Required Soft Skills’ summarises the employer’s prioritisation of the importance of soft skills when related to employability. However, approximately 3% of the interviews are not represented in the table as the subject of soft skills was not discussed. Communication Skills were perceived as most important by all employers.

Table 20: Employers Perception of required Soft Skills



The following Table 21 titled ‘Percentage emphasis on Soft Skills’ specifically highlights the emphasis by percentage that employers place on soft skills and the categories within the soft skill area.

Table 21: Percentage emphasis on Soft Skills



Communication Skills

Employers identified communication skills as most important when employing UAE Graduates. The primary consideration being the level of both verbal and written English as verified by the following responses:

E23: “We are looking for good communication skills. Especially English”

E26: “We need English and Arabic in speaking and writing, especially good emails”

E2: “The main skills required now are English – speaking and writing”

E6: “We want them to be professional in English”.

E8: “English skills, further effort has to be on English”.

E17: “We want English because we are dealing with many customers who don’t speak Arabic. So, we want them to have good English skills”.

E18: “We are interested in their communication skills, good English communications skills”... “For Freshers, we mainly focus on communication and attitude. That is key”.

E11: “First, we check their English, capability, how they communicate, how they speak, answer the questions and then we look at GPAs ... they need to be confident”

E26: “The basic skills we are looking for from the graduate, is proper communication skills and customer service skills, then we want commitment, that they will be trusted to come and do the work”

E20: “Most of the time, English, is what they are lacking in, honestly, we notice this with most of the applicants. They may have their technical skills, but they don’t know how to use Outlook, they are not fast at typing and if you give them a certain document to write, business correspondence in English they fail to do so. Those are the factors that get them ruled out for the job. We’ve experienced that many times”.

E22: “Communication is probably a really big one because we are client-facing, so we need somebody who can be pushed in front of a client and ready to go with that. Also, we have 200 offices across the world, so we need people who are able to fit into that network”. “English is the key thing and self-awareness”.

E4: “We’ve been to several career fairs over the last couple of years and speak at different universities across the UAE. After speaking to the students, we have noticed that the English level is not necessarily up to the mark, that’s required in a corporate environment working with 80 different nationalities, which is sort of quite challenging”.

“Also writing emails, scheduling calendars, communication, and verbal communication over the phone, are all important”.

E9: “We need good English, because our products are complicated, and we don’t want to confuse the customer by poor communication”.

Also, the universities are aware of the need to focus on the importance of communication skills as confirmed in the following responses

IC1: “students might be used to writing academic assignments, but they need to know how to communicate in a professional way by email”.

IC2: “we need to focus on communication skills, how to deal with customers, how to write emails, sometimes they use emoji’s or emotions in a professional email”.

IC3: “there’s a lack of practice of dealing with professionals over the telephone”

IC4: “Communication is important, some are shy. They will not say anything; they need to speak up”.

Employer (E20) stated that they had contacted graduates who had placed their job application online in Arabic when it was requested in English. They were called to ask them to resubmit in English, but they forwarded it again in Arabic. “I think it’s a communication problem”. We ask them to write their previous responsibilities in detail “but when you ask them, they cannot write them.”

In contrast, Employer (E21) advised “any fresh graduate can do admin work on a computer, and write emails, letters. It is easy for them”.

After good English verbal and written skills, 10% of the employers advised Professional Arabic Skills are required as they communicate with the government or people that expect formal written and professional verbal Arabic.

E26: “Unfortunately, some of the graduates will have good English but they are weak in Arabic. We need proper Arabic letter-writing and the ability to reply in writing, verbally and do presentations with professional Arabic”

E23: “Arabic and an understanding of the country is important”

E17: “We prefer both languages, Arabic and English”.

Attitude, Ambition & Passion

Attitude is a difficult skill to measure or quantify however it was the next most important soft skill after communication identified by more than 33% of employers during their interviews. On occasions employers identified attitude as more important to other soft skills as seen in the following responses:

E10: “The passion for the job, the commitment, the attitude, the ability to learn. If they have these and they have shown us in the assessment centre, the facility will take them. We don’t mind if they are doing a different major, say in education or art, before joining us, we don’t mind. If they have the ability and attitude, then we will take them”.

E14: “It’s more of a personality fit rather than experience because a lot of graduates come out of university without any particular experience in the fields when we’re looking at them. We know this, so attitude is the main thing we look at”.

E18: “We dig a little about their experience and their attitude... “For Freshers, we mainly focus on communication and attitude. That is key”.

“The attitude to learn. The hunger that they have, and to learn new things.”

E26: “the life standard has changed from the last 20 years in the UAE, attitude has changed as we were committed to our employer to come on time to earn our salaries. Now they don’t want to establish themselves, they are only working for the money”.

E28: “Students need to develop their attitude by working on grit, teamwork, curiosity, resilience; be intrinsically motivated, flexible, analytical, optimistic and have zest”.

E4: “It is a different culture, different attitude, a secretary in the States will ask, “Do you need coffee” or something like that. We have a lot of senior managers who fly in from Western countries and they may ask the secretary to grab them a coffee from Starbucks or order a Pizza. Here the assistant will say, “Why don’t you do it yourself?”

“It is a challenge; it is the level of soft skills”.

E9: “Attitude, recently we had an intern working with us. I had a chat with him. “You don’t look very happy”. “Well, I am sitting here and nobody’s telling me anything” I advised him “here, you have to understand is a focus-driven company. You want information, you go find it, and we have 140,000 employees around the world. They don’t have time to babysit someone”.

Additionally, HEIs were aware of the issue as well.

IC4: “Their GPA could be below but if their attitude and personality is good, they can brand themselves, they can get the job”

Another soft skill identified by employers during the interviews requires graduates to demonstrate ambition, the ability to be a self-starter and to also demonstrate passion for the position.

E22: “to be very honest, we just need ambition. We just need drive”.

E13: “in terms of what we’re looking for is somebody who’s a self-starter ... wanting to put the work in and willing to do some work that is a little less glamorous”.

E8: “ready to start working, gaining experiences, ambitious to gain skills, move forward with his career”. “We want them to be a sponge and work with us because we are a fast-growing company and they can climb to the top if they want to”.

E14: “It’s more to do with their behaviours. For our company, we have eight behaviours. It’s like passion for winning, competitiveness, longevity, integrity ... those kind of behaviours, if they can prove that during the interview process”.

E19: “We want them to be passionate. We want them to be passionate about work. We want to see that they would like to work with us. We want someone that will not accept a No for an answer” ...

E21: “When we hire fresh graduates, the first thing we look for is passion, being hard-working and committed and flexible. We support this”.

In a Focus group with employers comments were made as follows:

FEE1: “we are looking for graduates to be passionate about our mission of sustainability. ... We hire five new graduates each year. We train them for two years; they are assessed to determine their strengths”.

HEIs also commented on attitude.

IC4: “We need to stop spoon-feeding them, they need to get out there and search, not wait for everything to come to them”.

Time Management & Punctuality

Employers interviewed identified time management and punctuality as a significant consideration when employing UAE graduates as demonstrated by the following responses:

E1, E3, E4, E9, and E30: “Punctuality is an issue”.

E23: “Graduates need to be punctual and have good time management. We don’t want our customers kept waiting because the graduate can’t manage their time”.

E24: “They have to be reliable and able to manage their time. We are happy to train them, but we need them to turn up when we require them and not make excuses for why they cannot come to work”.

E5, E25: “We have a fingerprint machine, specifically to address punctuality”

Salary Package

Another important theme identified widely by employers when considering a graduate’s employability was the attitude of UAE graduates towards salary package expectations. More specifically, a graduate’s wage expectation, hours of work, and workplace location were all important considerations for employers when considering the suitability of a UAE graduate. Seventy per cent (70%) of the employers made various points relating to the salary & employment package expectations of graduates.

E18: “The first question we get from a lot of the graduates is “What’s the money?” ... “Some people don’t even ask what positions we have. They just ask, “How much will you pay?” Then the next questions are, “What are the hours of work.”

“Ok you give me this money, I will come.” If the first question is about money, which is a breaking point, then it becomes irrelevant to us. We are not interested in hiring them. There are a lot of opportunities here. We are a big company, multicultural, we’re flexible. We have a good life/work balance, we provide training and opportunity”.

E3: “Graduates want AED 40,000 we can afford between AED 13-15,000. Although the attitude is, they are willing to stay at home and not work for zero income rather than take AED 13,000-15,000.

E4: “They want the minimum requirement of 30K per month and working a set number of hours, however, we sell more the experience and even though we are semi-government we work like a private entity, we work from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. We sell experience and our graduates’ salaries are 25K”.

In one of the Employer focus groups, employers expressed:

FE2: “Money is important to the employee. We want the best and will pay but if the graduate is fixated on a title and wage that is a red flag to us”.

In one of the Alumni focus groups, graduates expressed their point of view as follows:

FA1: All agree the government jobs were in high demand due to the high pay and working hours, but they knew it was hard to get a job in the government now. They discussed the low pay in the private sector and the long working hours.

However, when asked how we can overcome the issue with high salary expectations, an employer suggested:

E29: “Promote the fact that if you go to a private company, you will learn quicker and your career path will be better and move faster”.

Whereas the HEIs advised the following:

C1: “They want convenience in terms of location and a good package. A salary of AED 30,000 plus the majority will not go below AED 20,000. Some employers are becoming more flexible with working hours and the graduates are willing to take less salary for less working hours.

IC4: “I will see a job opportunity; the salary will be from AED 10,000-15,000 and it’s in engineering. I will call the graduate and she says no. “I have a bachelor’s degree. No way”. I tell her “Two years of working and you will double it”. If you don’t do anything it’s not good for you, your qualifications will be out of date”. She still says no”.

IC1: “it is frustrating, we’re always having this conversation about government and the private sector packages. There are all these initiatives by the private sector like flexible working hours, maternity leave and their offering additional qualifications but the graduates still want better salary packages.

IC2: “We need to do more campaigns, invite more companies from the private sector, promote successful stories by local people, the social media, we need more support from the government”

CVs, Interview Preparation

When asked about interview preparation and the recruitment process, employers responded by saying:

E3: “They need to attend the interview on time. They need to practice with likely questions and be prepared.”

“They need to add more details to their CV. Such as when they graduated, what level, what was their GPA, what was their major and the location/Emirate, they wish to work”.

E4: “It’s simple things like, how to dress for the interview, how to present yourself in the interview, make sure that you bring your CV, make sure it’s not scruffy, prepare by doing mock interviews”.

E11: “They should give them courses on how to be confident when they are interviewed because sometimes, they are good in everything but they are not confident to talk... they can do sessions for them on how to write their CVs”.

E30: “Know their CV, be ready to answer anything about the CV, for example, I may ask them about a subject they studied, they need to be able to explain it. They need to show they know the latest in their industry and that they are aware of current developments”.

E17: “a graphic designer, we would love to see their portfolio, their works, in the university, in the CV, anywhere that they are drawing, we want to see their actual drawing. If they are a moviemaker or something, we want to see their movies and so on.”

E20: “They don’t get to see you or meet you first, but it’s the CV that sells them if it is well written, and at least should have the keywords, because not everyone looks through the all the applications. What we do is we search for the people, through a keyword search. If they don’t have the right keywords, their CV will not pop up in our results.”

“CVs don’t have the detailed responsibilities, discussing what they were responsible for or projects they have worked on during their study”.

E8: “There should be a standard CV format and the graduate uses it. Another issue is they use their personal email address, it is not professional, they need a proper email addressing their name so it looks professional”.

In contrast to the foregoing two employers stated:

E21: “The applications were perfect, yes perfect. No problems.”

E4: “The CVs are up to the standard”.

During in-depth interviews with HEIs, they advised that they were aware of the low standard of graduates CVs and discussed some of their interventions.

IC3: “Each semester, there’s five weeks of training. Week one is on CV writing, Week two is on self-branding, talking about LinkedIn, ePortfolio etc., to link in with the traditional CV. Week three is job search using our centralised jobs portal, or the latest job search platforms, events, both internal and external, like Jobs Abu Dhabi, Week Four is more about work ethics, what is expected of them as an employee, being a team player. Then week five, it is interview skills, understand the different interview processes, common interview questions and answers, and then from week six to week ten, we run the same five workshops in the same order. If a student has missed one of the five, they can pick it up”.

IC1: “The problem is the attendance, at these interview workshops ten may turn up. So then, I change my tack again. I bring in external speakers to present. But still, the attendance is low if it isn’t a mandatory requirement. I have seen the standard of CVs dropping.”

However, when Alumni were asked about interview and CV preparation during Focus Groups they responded as follows:

FA1: All were asked if they had worked with the university careers department on potential career development and to make connections with industry. They had not and were not sure where they were located. When a career advisor’s name was mentioned they said: “Oh, yes they had met with her, but did not realise they could go back and get more help”.

FA3a: “Career guidance did not help me at high school. Now I am enrolled in CALS (Career leadership) mentoring my peers to choose a career before it is too late. I do personal one-to-one sessions. I was too shy to ask so I think they are the same”.

FA3b: “Having an academic mentor is helpful and access to different mentors and gaining experience from different networks. Going to a one-to-one career counselling session works”.

FA3c: “I have learnt about the 70/20/10 Model. Where 70% is what I learn and am exposed to, 20% is about networking and working with mentors and 10% is about classroom learning and professional certification”.

“Students need to attend forums, meet with people so they get to know you. What we learnt at university is completely different in real life”.

An alumni interviewee recommended:

AI3: “They should make it compulsory to do employability skills at the university to prepare for the job”

Life-long learning, Technical Skills, GPAs and Professional Certification

Whilst the concept of life-long-learning was not addressed directly by the researcher with employers they did, however, provide the following observations:

E9: "It's about learning and wanting to learn".

E19: "We want them to like to learn more, the desire to learn".

E12: "Right now, apart from their technical knowledge and theory, we are looking for students who are willing to learn new things, and not being rigid about things. If a student is willing to learn, we are happy to have them join us."

E21: "What stands out for us is when the candidate tries to make a difference, upgrade her knowledge, improve herself".

E23: "They have to have a willingness to learn and keep learning. Things are changing so quickly they need to be flexible and able to adapt with the changes".

E24: "If they have a degree that is good as we know they know how to learn. We need them to want to learn."

E27: "We are willing to provide training, lots of training and career plans. We want the graduate to say with us. We are expanding there is lots of opportunities.

We will provide good work-life balance. We care about supporting the graduate. We provide training on and off the job and give regular performance appraisals to develop the employee. Career development is very important to us".

An employer in a focus group stated:

FEE1: "They need to be willing to grow and do that extra mile".

Employers also confirmed that the technical skills of graduates were generally not an issue especially when considered in relation to the graduate's speciality major.

E3: "They need the basic technical skills they are trained for in their degree, for example, a bachelor's in finance graduate needs to know all the requirement to make them able to

work in the Finance area. They would be able to show and be able to do the job for what they were trained for.”

E20: “... their technical competency is important. It depends on their field. If you are from accounting some software experience or from IT understand and use the terminology but really the main thing is being able to communicate”.

27: “We make sure new recruits are exposed to real work situations and we hire based on their technical and behavioural competencies that are required for the specific position. We offer development programs for new graduates that are usually two years. The graduate is expected to reach the required skills and work hard.”

However, many employers did comment on the type of degree relevant to their industry:

E16: “We have so many employees, we need Emirati graduates. We’re really looking for specific majors. Finance, since we are in the insurance industry and we need graduates with good English speaking and good communication skills, then we will train them in insurance. First and foremost, they need a Finance degree”.

E18: “We are an IT company, so we prefer to hire fresh graduates with an IT degree”.

E19: “Every five years we do a study about which majors we will need in the future and then hire based on our needs”.

E26: “We are looking for business administration because they can fill the administration positions. Of course, they can have majors in Accounting, Finance, HR, Supply Chain management but they need to be able to use technology”.

E3: “They need the basic technical skills they are trained in for their degree”

Whilst some employers had fewer specific requirements regarding tertiary qualifications:

E21: “No, we are taking any degree, we are a technology company, but we need HR, Accounting etc., for now, we are looking for the right person first”.

E4: “We are looking for nurses, secretarial staff, quality, operations, supply chain procurement, computer coding, communication, event management majors in many different areas”.

The need for Professional Certifications was a topic responded to by employers as follows:

E10: “Moreover, it’s great if they have certification like CIA for the financing or CIPD for HR. That would be great as well”.

E2: “Professional certification is required for certain jobs, Accounting & Finance – CFA, CAC, Legal –LPC and HR – CIPD.

E20: “... if you have the degree, if you don’t have the certain certification required, for example, you are an electrical engineering graduate and you are looking for a job, let’s say a site engineer. If the client or the vendor requires a vendor certificate and you don’t have the required one, that’s one of the reasons that you’re being ruled out.

E3: “Graduates don’t appear to know that they require professional certifications or the specific ones that relate to their major”.

In contrast, the following employer stated:

E16: “no professional certification is not required”

Most employers did not appear to focus on Grade Point Average (GPA) when making the employability decision.

E11: “We are looking for 2.5 and above but it’s OK if it’s a lower and they have very good English and very good communication skills”.

E14: “GPA is not the main thing”.

E17: “If the GPA is two-point something that is OK but it’s the work they have done if it is creative and good, we won’t worry about the GPA”.

E21: “Normally we don’t check the GPA, we look at their specialisation, what the degree was and their CV overall, it’s the experience they have, the subjects they have studied and if it’s related to what we need or not”.

FE2: “We are more flexible about GPA now. We increased the GPA at one stage but have now reduced the requirements. We are using assessments to assess leadership skills, passion and moving away from a set GPA criterion. “

E15: “When I see their GPA, it’s not a high criteria.”

E30: “Passion supersedes GPA.”

However, a few employers, mainly government, advised their attitude towards GPA as follows:

E4: “GPA is a criterion, it is important. We expect graduates of three and above, then if they score high in our psychometric assessments, we go through an ability assessment, the

verbal, logical and numerical reasoning and then they go through a very intense interview to ensure we get the right person.”

E10: “We look at the GPA it is important. Over 3 at least. When comparing a candidate, we will take the one with the higher GPA.”

E9: “We sort CVs by technical qualifications and GPA before we interview them.”

Internships, Graduate Programs and Work Experience

The relevance of internships, work experience and graduate training programs was discussed with employers who provided the following responses:

E19: “We take lots of students in our workplace, and during the internship, most of the students have been employed”.

E21: “It is good the students do internships and they get a chance to go to different companies, it gives them a chance to work out what they may want to do in the future”.

E20: “if they do an internship before or after graduation and gain additional certificates that will really help their profile”.

Employers also elaborated upon the training programs that they offered graduates:

E10 “We have a one-year training and rotation once they are placed in a job”.

E14: “We have a one-year program called Tech pro. At the moment it is just for the engineers. They go on a three-month rotation through the different business areas. At the end, they’re guaranteed a job, so it’s like a graduate program and it’s paid”.

E15: “We will only hire a Bachelor graduate, it would be useful but not necessary if it’s Engineering, IT, Marketing or Business but it does not really matter as we will train the new graduate”.

E16: “We will train them, all about our industry”.

E17: “First thing they will do when joining our company, they’ll get training. For example, they accept me in the PR department. I’ll get training in PR. The same thing in the other areas”.

E27: “We offer development programs for new graduates they are usually two years. The graduate is expected to reach the required skills and work hard”.

E4: “We do a learning and medical terminologies program. A basic one for those going into roles related to patient access or the contact centre and then we have a three month intensive program that includes training on medical terminology, soft skills, hierarchy, who’s your manager, you line manager, how you communicate through emails, how to understand and work with our systems”.

E5: “We have a program where the graduate rotates through different departments and at each stage, they do presentations on what they have learnt”.

E6: “The manager provides the training, they will work with the individual, their experience and provide internal or external training as required”.

E9: “We have a Global Training Programme, and we took a finance guy, young local, sent him to Zurich for six months. He said “I am getting married” and we sent his wife as well. Then he went to Malaysia for six months and now he is full time with us in Dubai”.

Employers in focus groups stated:

FE2: “We allow the graduate three months to settle in, they receive orientation, details about the code of conduct, an informal buddy and then we assess them after the first three months. Have they been proactive, are they able to navigate the systems? We assess on three points. 1. Their fit within the culture, 2. Their ability to deliver on KPAs, 3. Their emotional intelligence to grow – soft skills working within the company and their ability to build networks”.

FE1: “We have similar graduate programs and orientation as other companies. Additionally, we assess their creativity. We set them up in a specific project in the second month then at the six-month point they present their progress and findings to the CEO. We can assess if they have responded well. Although the onus is on the employers to support the onboarding experience. We need to value the new graduate and engage them, so they wish to stay”.

One employer suggested that government should have the following involvement:

E3: “When a graduate is employed whether it is public or private there should be a six-month follow-up on each new employee by the government to see how they are progressing and where the gaps are in their skills and knowledge. Then Government training programs should be provided where there are consistent gaps”.

When the matter of the employer’s expectation of a graduates experience prior to joining a company was raised, the following was suggested:

E14: They need a bachelor's degree; they don't need experience. It's more a personality fit rather than experience because obviously, graduates will leave university without particular experience in the field. Attitude is the main thing we look at.

E20: We are hiring fresh graduates. They don't have experiences, so it all goes back to their skills and their education.

E10 We don't expect them to have experience when they are a fresh graduate. We hire them without experience.

However, Alumni stated in focus groups that employers required the following:

FA2a: "They want us to have two years' experience"

FA2b: "Fifteen years' experience if we want a managers position"

FA1a: "I know a lot of graduates who have tried for a job and have been told they need work experience, but they can't get it. I have decided to take a job to get the experience and understand how to work then see if I can move up"

FA3a: "We need to be pushed to experience new things and gain exposure".

Some employers suggested that the internship or work experience programs within universities should be developed further.

E26: "I want the students to have work placement opportunities from year one and every year, so they learn how to be on time and committed to the workplace. Not during summer, it should not happen during the semester".

"It should be two or three months. I recommend 90 days, you can see an achievement or small project, the employer has time to view everything. Eight weeks is not enough. I recommend 90 days at least and every year".

"They will develop because they will be interacting with people, they will be able to think differently, they will meet people, and they will be able to think about their future job. It's not only during the graduation year".

E3: "The Government HR should push all businesses to hire or give valuable work experience to new graduates. Not just for 8 weeks of work placement that they did in their degree but more valuable work with required outcomes that allows the graduates to gain useful work experience".

Whilst Alumni in the focus groups raised the issue of unproductive work experience programs:

FA1a: advised when she was at a large company, they said it would take at least 6 weeks to explain the process and the concepts to her and they did not have the time. She and the majority of the focus group advised they spent their work placement/experience filing or reading the workplace manual.

FA2b: “two months just reading and nothing from 8 to 2 just sitting”.

However, the HEIs suggested the following developments:

IC1: “it needs more planning, work-placement opportunities, internship opportunities, sponsorship opportunities, need to be aligned with labour market needs and become a more in-depth process. If you are offering somebody an internship or work placement it has to be meaningful, there has to be a training plan, somebody needs to be on hand to mentor and coach the student whilst there’re on the work placement or internship. The concept of having the work placement in the graduation year allows the company to use it as pre-induction to the company and reduce recruitment costs, it’s a free test run. On the other hand, students need exposure to the work environment much earlier, particularly if they have not had exposure in high school”.

Future Requirements

When employers were questioned about future employment requirements for graduates, they responded with the following:

E1: “They must have good Microsoft office skills and the ability to do presentations”.

E11: “They will need more professional qualifications and certificates”.

E19: “They will need to be able to work with Artificial Intelligence and robots”.

E2: “The future is technology and Artificial Intelligence, they need the knowledge”.

E21: “The skills for the future will be the same. They should continue to develop their computer skills”.

E28: “The ability to multitask and there will be more freelancers and virtual workers”.

E3: “I don’t know what will be required in the future. It will change but right now we need to focus on getting graduates with the right skills”.

E24: “They will need to continue to be willing to learn”.

When the same question was put to HEIs they advised the following:

IC1: “New skills like data analytics, social media literacy, business sense, resilience and emotional intelligence and again the willingness and ability to learn. Obviously, there will be growth in industries like artificial intelligence and all the technology affected by that. The way people do their jobs will change and how they use technology”.

IC4: “We need future student graduates to be in the habit of learning by doing online courses and continuing to enhance their skill development. They need to take responsibility for learning independently”.

Employers Recommendations to HEIs

In concluding the interviews, employers were asked what they recommend HEIs could do to further prepare graduates. The employers identified the following four areas, collaboration, employability preparation, skills development and employer-led workshops.

Collaboration

Employers appeared to value collaboration.

E3: “I am a firm believer in the Triple Helix model. Where the university, industry and the government work together to increase the economic growth. But the graduates need the community to be involved as well as industry, government and the university all working together to change attitudes and support the new graduates to get work and work experience”.

E19: “We need to sit together and discuss the features of the majors. We need to check our job titles and what we need the graduate to do and then ensure they are being taught that at University. Each employer knows what skills they require students to learn”.

E9: “Universities need to visit corporations and tell us what they are doing and speak to us and listen to us”.

E1: “Happy to have students visit our organisation and take them on a tour, once a semester, so they can gain a better appreciation of the industry”.

In the focus group, an employer stated:

FE1: “Employers and educators need to change how they work; we need to partner. The skills required for future jobs are changing. I have to continually learn to ensure I am relevant. So, will they. Everything is changing”.

Employability Preparation

Another recommendation by employers towards the HEIs related to employability preparation.

E2: “Focus on projects, real hands-on practical projects as assessment rather than theory. We want graduates they are aware of the real world and real issues”.

E11: “They should give the graduates courses on how to be interview and build confidence is talking. They need sessions on how to improve CVs.”

E20: “All graduating students should be provided with workshops on career preparedness, mock interviews, how to prepare for an interview. Starting with how to apply for the job, some tips on recruitment how to improve their CVs, how to make them stand out, and using keywords”.

E4: “Do mock interviews with them, prepare them for interviews”

E20: “All CVs should be tracked and checked by the university, they should use a set format and be able to improve the profiles of the candidates. Help us find the specific graduates we need then we can interview them”.

Skills Development

Employers recommended HEIs focus on skills development of the graduates.

E18: “Need to work towards developing students with an open mind, willing to be exposed to different ideas and develop and not focus on money as that will come if the graduate is willing to be open-minded and try new approaches”.

E4: Incorporate soft skills such as communication, attitude, ambition, time management, and passion workplace awareness, confidence, self-awareness into the curriculum make it part of the curriculum. Ensure they learn employability skills throughout the time they are doing their degree”.

E3: “The University needs to work with the students to develop in the areas they excel. Each graduate should have their own career development plan and they need to continue to focus on development after they receive their bachelor or masters. Unemployment is high across the UAE and we need to help prepare the graduates”.

Employer led Workshops

Employers expressed views on employer-led workshops.

E10: “We have requested this many times, we want to meet with the students and present the banking industry and explain how it works”.

E11: “Employers need to meet with the students and explain our industry”.

E18: “Allow us to speak to the students to give them true information, invite guest speakers or ask the students to do research that relates to our industry. Have someone from industry tell them what it is like to work in the industry or they could do a day visit to the companies to see how they work”.

E20: “Have someone from industry explain what we are looking for when we hire, the required skills, and how to go about getting the job and then how it varies across companies and why some companies pay more and some pay less and how experience and qualifications are looked at.

E9: “Guest speakers from some of the companies come and stand on the stage, not for 15 minutes, but for a two-hour structured program and then a question and answer period. Corporations could get a credit from the government as community service”.

E4: “Have people from industry come and talk to the students and tell them what it is like to work in the industry and it is not all about the title and the money”.

UAE HEIs Initiatives

Further to the employer interviews, eight in-depth interviews and three focus groups across ten universities discussed different approaches that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were adopting towards employability for current students and graduates. The questions related to sound practices and initiatives used to engage graduates and employers in developing more employable graduates.

The following range of sound practices and initiatives were discussed:

- “Twice weekly Employer on Campus Days
- Attendance at external Careers Fairs
- HEI annual Careers Fairs
- Job shadow days
- Employer led competitions and workshops
- Careers days for each department/bachelor within the HEI
- Career Recruitment month – job opportunities, on-campus interviews
- Seminars/competitions/classes throughout the year and workshops
- Going to where the students are and talking
- Employment Readiness Programs
- Career contact/staff member for each department with the university

- Career staff – receive personal development & certification
- Use of on-line databases to record notes of meetings and student workshop attendance
- CV writing competitions
- Student volunteers working with new students
- Report your experiences – Fresh graduates discuss positive stories on employment and approaches used
- Mock interview days with employers”

In addition to this, one HEI developed and released a five-year Employability strategy;

IC2: “to develop an effective platform for life-long learning and successful employment, provide the best value for students’ educational investment and deliver graduates able to contribute to the economy and society. The three key priorities are to develop and embed the eight-core Graduate Attributes within each bachelor, create employability awards for courses and communicate a distinct employability offer to each individual student embedded throughout the curriculum”.

Whilst another HEI engaged a working team to develop the following;

IC1: “specific services tailored to the varying student groups and ensuring their needs and individual preferences were addressed. They involve self-assessment tests, using technology for career exploration and career pathway guidance, providing individual career counselling, providing online accredited courses and face-to-face workshops to improve employability, engaging students with employers and attending career fairs and finally working with alumni through their career changes and providing upskilling professional development”.

Whilst these initiatives are in their embryonic stage UAE HEIs have demonstrated that they are focused and working hard on improving graduate employability. Other initiatives discussed by

UAE HEIs include the following:

IC2: “I’m always encouraging my students to work by themselves on themselves. Go to workshops, more training, reading books, registering for online courses. All this makes them stand out in their CV”.

IC3: “Each semester, there’s five weeks of training. Week one is on CV writing, Week two is on self-branding, talking about LinkedIn, ePortfolio etc., to link in with the traditional CV. Week three is job search using our centralised jobs portal, or the latest job search platforms, events, both internal and external, like Jobs Abu Dhabi, Week Four is more about work ethics, what is expected of them as an employee, being a team player. Then week five, it is interview skills, understand the different interview processes, common

interview questions and answers, and then from week six to week 10, we run the same five workshops in the same order. If a student has missed one of the five, they can pick it up”.

IC4: “We have Alumni working in the Academic support centre, to support student learning. There is one Alumni that comes every Thursday, she gets paid and she’s always there. She’s always helping and she’s very good with the other students”.

IC3: “Employer on Campus – twice a week. This is a dedicated time for the employer to meet with our students. The employer chooses the activities they wish to do, they may wish to collect CVs, do interviews, or instruct students on how to prepare for the world of work, even do mock interviews or offer part-time work to gain experiences.

We have gained feedback on the employers’ CV needs and increased our knowledge of the local market. The employers have brought in Emirati role models that the students relate well to”.

“We have a graduate program where we work with the potential graduates to give them feedback on their CVs and how to be productive in their job search”.

Individuals within the HEI focus groups outlined some of the approaches their HEI was taking:

FCG1a: “We start the journey with the student from day one and then continue to work with them”.

“We moved the location of our offices to more accessible to the students, we combined careers, work placement, the employer centre and Alumni”.

“We have 16 weeks of mandatory work placement in the degrees”.

FCG1b: “We have pop up/ jump in 15 minutes appointments either by the reception to attract the student or in the library”.

“We join the faculty in their classrooms for one hour each semester to meet with every student each year. Year 1- We discuss their Career Plan, Year 2 Developing their CV, Year 3- Interviews and developing their Networks, Year 4- Alumni and how we can support their next stage”.

“We provide Career Support for 2 years after they graduate”.

“We have career ambassadors that are student volunteers that work with the student one on one”.

“We communicate using social media – Snap Chat, Instagram and whatever reaches the students”.

FCG1c: “We engage our students in the space, we have changed our office layout to a lounge, chilled out, the environment that feels comfortable, with bright colours, free coffee and access to employment resources”.

“We have creative conversations with industry. We have events in Dubai such as our recent mini networking event. We have a specific person in the group who is responsible for data and attracting students and engaging them in our events”.

“We have a successful student ambassador program that is evolving, we won the global peer award for this program”.

FCG1d: “Virtually we have a portal with mobile apps, a vacancy support system called Target Connect and our website has tabs for events, workshop times and an appointment system”.

“We have alumni talk about their experience and journey of working in a particular sector. We try to reframe it and put a spin on the challenges”.

An HEI spokesperson discussed a government and employer initiative:

IC1: “all hotels came together under the Department of Culture and Tourism whereby they do joint recruitment fairs, at all campuses and universities and have different initiatives. One example is the Khebraty Program, which is offering a part-time job for 20 hours a week, all hotels across the region are offering the same via the Department of Culture and Tourism.

One employer also discussed the progress of this program:

E1: “... was hired on the Khebraty program and was then hired fulltime as the Human Resources Coordinator. We currently have two Khebraty students here, one undergraduate and one doing their masters. The program is aimed at Emirati students who are keen to explore career options and able to commit twenty hours per week to work within the hospitality and tourism sector. They earn a monthly salary and are employed on an annual employment contract and we work around their study schedule”.

“We have another Khebraty male who joined us after two years working at another venue and they did not need additional staff, so he applied here, and we hired him to work at reception”.

Another theme discussed across all HEIs was how to develop collaboration with industry, arising from discussions with faculty, career specialists and focus groups as follows:

Faculty:

IF2: “We hold annual division program advisory meetings across all campuses with industry to discuss our degrees, the outcomes, the curriculum and what skills they require”.

Career Specialists:

IC1: “employer-led workshops with topics such as job interview skills that only take an hour of the employer’s time. Or invite industry to come and speak on an employer panel. Or do a brief networking event or breakfast. The approach is to make it low-level commitment, something that doesn’t require the employer to have done a lot of preparation back at the office before they come”.

Focus Groups:

FCG1b: “We meet with individual employers to get feedback and what they think are the future needs. We try to form close partnerships with employers. We know the different recruitment methods of employers and how to prepare students”

“More employers are setting up assessment centres, therefore we need to do mock assessments with our students to better prepare them for the employer”.

FEE1b: “We help them meet their Emiratization targets. We provide an online system that can streamline the connections between our students and the employers”.

“We have an employee recognition ceremony each year with awards for the most sponsorship, most work placement opportunities, most volunteer offerings. Employers sponsor extra curriculum activities as well”.

FCG2a: “We need to hear from our stakeholders more, meet with employers and students and find out what they need and want. We need to listen more to be flexible and adapt in a practical way”.

Summary

This chapter analysed research information gathered across forty-one (41) in-depth interviews with Employers, HEIs and Alumni. Additionally, Six (6) focus groups were conducted with the same entities. This analysis addresses the following research questions concerning UAE Employability.

RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?

RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates?

RQ3. What are the main influences for Employer’s when deciding to employ UAE graduates?

The foregoing analysis of results was presented without interpretation. This will be undertaken in the next chapter where the results will be interpreted in conjunction with relevant literature, conclusions developed, limitations discussed, and recommendations for future research made.

Chapter V: Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations

Summary of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study has been to investigate the initiatives HEIs are implementing to improve graduate employability outcomes and the employer's perception of UAE graduate employability. The study addressed the following important research questions.

RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?

RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates?

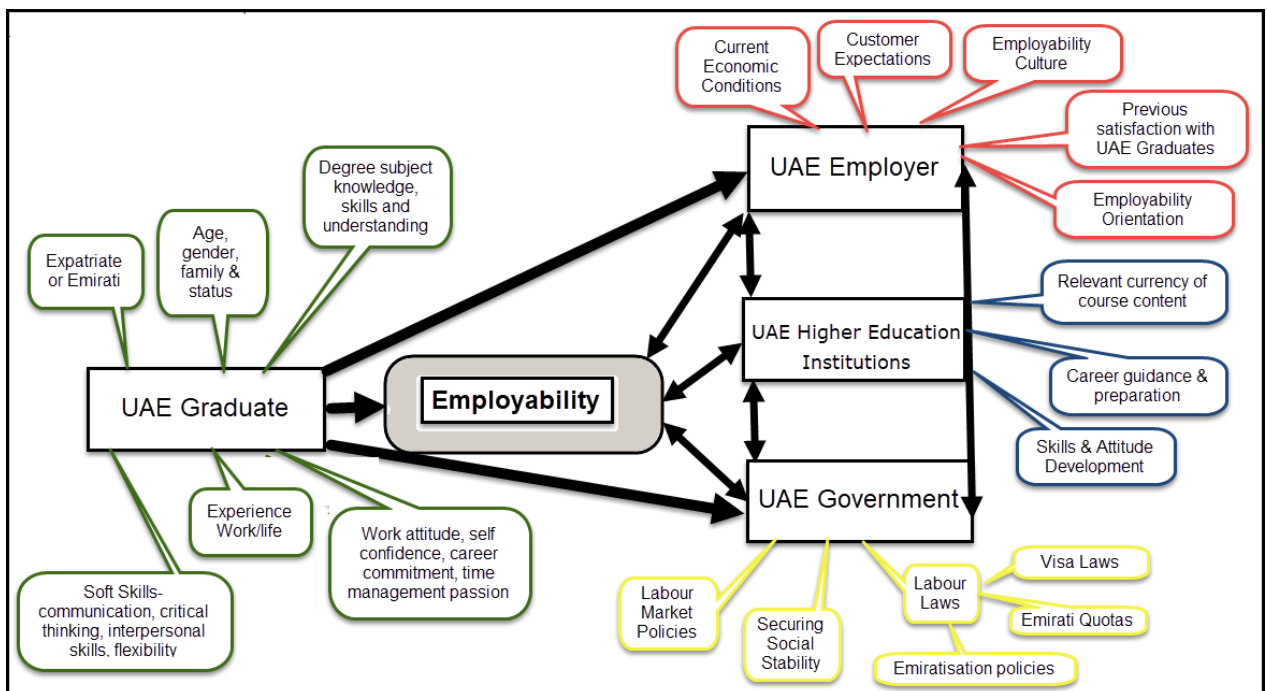
RQ3. What are the main influences for Employer's when deciding to employ UAE graduates?

The study involved forty-one (41) in-depth interviews and six (6) focus groups using a sample of thirty (30) employers across twelve (12) UAE industry sectors. Additionally, the study explored the initiatives that UAE Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employment. This portion of the research was undertaken utilising eleven (11) in-depth interviews and four (4) focus groups across a sample of ten (10) HEIs.

The context of the UAE is complex and unique due to factors such as the comparatively recent federation of seven emirates less than 50 years ago, its relatively tax free environment, its extremely large sovereign wealth fund, its control over a significant amount of the world's fossil fuel resources, and its extremely dynamic and fluid economic development. This dynamic complexity influenced the development of the conceptual framework which is a blending of several relevant models and frameworks, including Pool & Sewell (2007) 'Career EDGE' model, Guilbert

et al. (2016) model of ‘Global and Cultural context on Employability’ and the integrated framework developed by WEF (2014) concerning the ‘Dynamics and Vulnerabilities of the Employment system in GCC Countries’. These concepts and frameworks formed the basis of a customised framework specifically for the UAE context. Refer to Figure 1 below titled “UAE Graduate Employability Framework” which is discussed in detail in Chapter II.

Figure 1: UAE Graduate Employability Framework (Hassock 2019)



The conclusions reached in this study are guided by the research questions RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 summarised as follows:

RQ1. What initiatives are Higher Education Institutions currently implementing to improve UAE graduate employability?

This research found that HEIs were initiating a varied approach of initiatives towards aiding and improving the employability of UAE graduates. These educational strategies have been incorporated into the strategic plans of the HEIs and many have embedded them into their daily operations. All HEIs are aware of the importance of working with UAE graduates to assist them to improve their employability skill levels to become more employable.

One university announced a 5-year Employability Strategic Vision plan with employability skills fully embedded within all the curricula. Another HEI commissioned a team of consultants to work with all stakeholders to develop a holistic plan across its campuses to support and develop an employability culture.

However, the research identified significant shortcomings in the process which included the lack of initiative and leadership displayed by HEIs whilst working and collaborating with industry as well as a lack of communication when initiatives were being undertaken. All HEIs discussed the initiatives and the programs they were implementing towards employability and those initiatives were aligned with global best practice. However, not all graduates appeared to be aware of the HEI initiatives or ready to take the opportunity to be involved. HEIs considered making the employability training mandatory or implementing the approaches in a more effective manner. Whilst many HEIs had industry advisory boards and were attempting to interact and collaborate with industry, employers did not perceive they were being adequately consulted, informed or working in collaboration with HEIs. The study confirmed that industry appeared genuinely ready to work with HEIs to discuss, develop and collaborate on strategies to improve the employability of UAE graduates.

RQ2. What initiatives do Employers require Higher Education Institutions to implement to improve the employability of UAE graduates?

Employers expressed the desire to collaborate and meet with HEIs so they could influence the development of curriculum that is relevant to their changing needs. Employers wanted to know more about the content of the degrees and what initiatives HEIs were implementing towards improving UAE Graduate employability. Industry did not feel connected with the educational institutions. Employers were not aware of the initiatives being undertaken by HEIs to improve the employability of UAE graduates. Employers also stated that the students lacked the basic skills required for interview preparation.

Employers indicated that they would like to collaborate with HEIs in the education process by attending classes as guest speakers to discuss their industry experiences and the types of situations students may encounter when working in the industry. Employers suggested HEIs include real-life industry projects and problems in the student's curriculum. Industry representatives indicated that they were happy to work with HEIs to support this approach. Some employers suggested the HEIs should go out into industry and meet with them in the workplace to discuss collaborative teaching approaches.

Industry emphasised that they wanted to engage with students before they became graduates so they could provide real industry teaching examples and ensure students developed an awareness of the relevant employability skills.

RQ3. What are the main influences for Employer's when deciding to employ UAE graduates?

The research confirmed that employers had a desire to hire UAE graduates that had the right work attitude and a passion to learn. Employers were prepared to train the fresh UAE Graduates but the graduate needed to demonstrate that they were receptive to learning. UAE Employers are required to abide by the Emiratisation laws that they are obligated to hire an Emirati provided that they display the skills, the required work attitude and desire to learn.

Employers confirmed that they would support the UAE graduate by providing training and relevant experiences in the workplace however they expect the graduate to demonstrate punctuality whilst showing the initiative to work hard and learn. The issue of unrealistic starting salary expectations and conditions also impacts the employer's decision to hire UAE graduates. Employers are focused on filling vacant job positions with talented graduates whilst developing their skills and competencies necessary for their industry.

The following is a discussion of the major findings and conclusions reached during this research including the final recommendations and reflections on this study.

The research provided rich, complex, and extremely valuable data concerning the perspective employers have regarding the current standard of employability amongst UAE graduates. Employers provided recommendations concerning how the employability of UAE graduates could be enhanced and improved together with data confirming which factors influence the employer's decision when hiring a UAE graduate. All interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and uploaded to NVivo12 to facilitate data management. All data was coded and analysed using thematic research which uncovered distinct employability themes relating to the research

questions. Some findings were grouped together when making the recommendations due to the overlap between results.

This original research investigates the initiatives currently being undertaken by HEIs to improve UAE graduate employability. In addition to this, the research investigates the employer's perception of the employability of UAE graduates and what improvements HEIs could undertake to improve graduate employability. Previous research in the UAE as displayed in Table 1 appears to be mainly quantitative and focuses on the student as demonstrated by Jarrar, 2018 who worked with the British Council to survey business executives regarding the future employment skills required as well as Gulf Talent, 2016 who surveyed 303 recent graduating students at AUS on their perception of their potential employability, Forstenlechner et al, 2012 who surveyed 250 UAE HRM personnel on Emiratisation and finally Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011 who analysed data from surveys conducted with 48 managers which focused specifically on Emiratisation. This research, however, is the first qualitative research that focuses on the HEIs and Employers perspective of graduate employability whilst seeking to identify solutions by undertaking 41 in-depth interviews and 6 focus groups across all 12 industry sectors and 10 HEIs. Despite the complexity and dynamic nature of the employability situation in the UAE context, it was interesting to note that the findings in this research were not dissimilar to studies in Western countries. Employers perceived that graduates required improved communication skills especially English and that they present with a positive work attitude, a desire to learn and be ready to continue life long learning. The similarity in the findings with Western countries may be due to the effects of globalisation and the interrelationship of the global demand for skilled personnel to meet the current and future international demands of industry. The findings and

recommendations identified in this study will not only be used to inform policy direction for HEIs but also to guide further development and improvement in UAE graduate employability. Additionally, the information may be used to inform all stakeholders concerning the current situation of UAE graduate employability through the perspective of UAE employers and UAE HEIs.

Key Findings

The key findings arising from this research include greater focus on improving the UAE graduates' soft skills, specifically communication skills, improved work attitudes, the development of a passion for life-long learning, improved graduate CVs and better interview preparation including overall recruitment preparation. The findings also suggest improvements in the work placement/internship program and finally, enriched productive collaboration from all stakeholders working together with a focus on improving UAE graduate employability.

Finding 1 - Improved soft skills, specifically communication

The first significant finding of this research relates to recommendations by employers that graduates require extensive development of their soft skills including development and improvement in their English communication skills, and in some cases, improved Arabic communication skills. This was indicated by comments such as:

E23: "We are looking for good communication skills. Especially English"

E26: "We need English and Arabic in speaking and writing, especially good emails"

Previous international studies reported similar findings, for instance, LinkedIn (2018) found after surveying four thousand (4,000) global managers, talent developers and executives that the number one priority for talent development in 2018 was training in soft skills, specifically technical fluency, critical thinking and communication. In addition to this, the report by the Confederation of British Industry and Pearson Publishers (CBI/Pearson 2012) in which they surveyed 542 employers stated that improvements in English, self-management, business awareness and work attitudes were required. A study by Deloitte (2017) cited Deakin University in Australia as embedding soft skills into all their degrees alongside the technical or disciplinary skills to indicate the key capability of graduates. Additionally, the soft skills were assessed in the same manner as technical skills. Deakin University attaches credentials to the acquisition of soft skills as it allows the employer an insight into the graduate's soft skill capabilities. Similar approaches are being taken in Germany and Switzerland (Greenberg & Nilssen 2015).

This research revealed that one UAE university has implemented a five-year employability strategy with three key priorities one of which is aimed at embedding eight core skills graduate attributes within each bachelor degree program. This study acknowledges the requirement to further develop soft skills, specifically communication, both written and verbal. It is also recognised that UAE employers together with previous international studies and UAE HEIs have similar views concerning graduates and the need for further development of their soft skills.

Therefore, based on the specific findings from most UAE employers, action is required to further develop the soft skills of UAE graduates whilst they are studying. This can be done by embedding soft skills training within the student's curriculum including built-in assessments with credentials that attach to the student's record verifying the level of soft skills attained by the student.

Finding 2 - Improved work attitudes

The second significant finding of this research concerns the request by employers that the UAE graduate place less emphasis on the salary package and work conditions and greater emphasis on their commitment to work, including attitude, ambition, passion, time management, and punctuality. Some employers' views included:

E10: "The passion for the job, the commitment, the attitude, the ability to learn. If they have these and they have shown us in the assessment centre, the facility will take them. We don't mind if they are doing a different major, say in education or art, before joining us, we don't mind. If they have the ability and attitude, then we will take them".

E14: "It's more of a personality fit rather than experience because a lot of graduates come out of university without any particular experience in the fields when we're looking at them. We know this, so attitude is the main thing we look at".

E22: "to be very honest, we just need ambition. We just need drive".

The findings are consistent with international employers who had also stated that a positive attitude and the ability to manage themselves was most important (CBI 2009). GCU (2018) noted that employers stated that a degree is not enough to be employable, the graduate must have the ability to cope with challenges in the workplace and needs to have business awareness skills.

Another challenge nominated by UAE employers was the need for effective time management and reliability.

E1, E3, E4, E9, and E30: "Punctuality is an issue".

E23: "Graduates need to be punctual and have good time management. We don't want our customers kept waiting because the graduate can't manage their time".

A research study of 450 Australian business managers and executives by TAFE NSW (2015) found time management (97%) and communication skills (95%) were amongst the most vital skills for applicants. In addition, Chhinzer & Russo (2018) collected data from 122 Canadian employers who advised that graduates needed to have overall communication and time management skills and a willingness to work and create a holistic awareness of the work construct.

In relation to salary package, several employers made assertions similar to the following example:

E18: “The first question we get from a lot of the graduates is “What’s the money?” ... “Some people don’t even ask what positions we have. They just ask, “How much will you pay?” Then the next questions are, “What are the hours of work” and “Ok you give me this money, I will come.” If the first question is about money, which is a breaking point, then it becomes irrelevant to us. We are not interested in hiring them. There are a lot of opportunities here. We are a big company, multicultural, we’re flexible. We have a good life/work balance, we provide training and opportunity”.

The issue of salary package expectation is consistent with findings of past study by Ernst & Young (2015) who stated that the biggest challenge to hiring graduates in the GCC remains the high salary expectations. Although Gulf Talent (2016) confirmed that the salary expectations vary dramatically depending upon the graduate’s nationality. Expatriate graduates on average expected a salary of AED 9,000 per month in contrast with the Emirati graduate who expected an average starting salary of AED 27,000. International research confirms that for millennials the salary package is an important factor when contemplating a position, including factors such as the salary offer, advancement opportunities and job location are all important considerations (Career Rookie 2010). Howe & Strauss (2000) advise some graduates believe that their first job should provide the “initial payoff” for all the stress they have endured whilst studying whereas others believe that it is their right to seek out a position that meets their expectations and will not accept less

(Jayasingam & Thurasamy, 2018). Tomlinson (2012) supported this position by declaring that recent graduates think they are taking control over their career by being choosy.

Emiratis expect, and Employers accept, that Emirati UAE graduates will earn more money, be provided with better conditions, receive better job security and be required to work less hours than the non-Emirati UAE graduate. Employers openly acknowledged during their interviews that their priority was to hire Emirati graduates before considering non-Emirati graduates where employment skills were equal.

Whilst Emiratisation was not discussed directly by many employers during their interviews, they were all aware they were obliged to actively participate in the Government's policy. Key Employers comments included:

E27: We have Emiratisation ratios that we need to meet

E8: Universities need to enhance the Emirati graduates vision, their perception about the Emiratisation program because they are Emiratis by law we have to employ them.

E9: We can't hire people from overseas that have more skills anymore we have to participate in Emiratisation.

E1: We have to take people from here unless you can prove they can't do the job.

One HEI Career specialist advised:

IC1: Companies now have to say why that position in some industries was not offered to an Emirati. They have to advise why they didn't recruit a UAE national. The changes to the Emiratisation policies and procedures are beneficial for UAE national graduates. I think companies are more committed to meeting their Emiratisation targets than before, which is good. Although sometimes I do get

the feeling that they are focused on a target. “I have to recruit 50 UAE nationals by December.” Now obviously they want the best candidates and when they come onto campus they will have recruitment procedures like CV screening and behaviour assessments at the workplace but I really hope they have thought about the types of job opportunities they are going to offer the graduates and the career path for those graduates.

The Government’s current Emiratisation policy results in a clear prioritisation of Emirati graduates over non-Emiratis.

Employers in the UAE make a clear distinction between Expatriate Graduates and Emirati Graduates when considering graduates for employment. Employers are acutely aware of the Government’s requirement to prioritise the employment of Emirati Graduates over non-Emiratis under their policy of ‘Emiratisation’, however, if the Emirati graduate does not have the required skills employers are permitted to consider an expatriate graduate that has the necessary skills. Employers are regularly attending UAE universities to recruit Emiratis whilst special career fairs limited to Emirati graduates are also being arranged. An example of this is the Tawdheef Career fair held annually for the thirteenth time in January 2019 as an Emiratisation event on recruitment & career development held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre. The total attendance was 18,537 with 54 separate employers represented with the primary objective of discussing employment prospects and opportunities with HEI graduates and students. The employers are looking to achieve a sustainable national workforce by meeting new Emirati applicants, conducting onsite interviews as well as increasing awareness of their particular business to the Emirati job seeker (TAWDHEEF 2019). Of the Emiratis who attended the career fair looking for jobs 26% were UAE Emirati

graduates, 31% were unemployed Emirati graduates whilst 13% were looking for government sector positions and 11% for private sector positions.

The ‘Talent Enterprise’ held in 2014 confirmed that 72% of all MENA business and HR leaders’ emphasised the employment of nationals as a priority. Although their research indicated that there was a shift from attracting graduate talent based on a quota-driven approach towards meaningful, genuine and enduring talent advancement (Jones & Punshi 2014). There is also an increased focus on filling vacant job positions with talented graduates and then developing their skills and competencies to fit the requirements of the companies work culture (UAE Government News 2019).

H.E. Nasser Bin Thani Al Hamli from the Ministry of Human Resources & Emiratization has stressed that Emiratization is a national priority to be regulated across 10 sectors including aviation, transportation, real estate development, communications, technology, service centres, finance and banking, insurance, retail and Tourism (UAE Government News 2019).

The UAE government has focused on empowering its nationals through activation of Article 14 of the Law regulating labour relations, direct employment, implementing the national employment policy and developing quality Emiratization systems (UAE Government News 2019). The government has commenced an Emiratization Club that provides privileges to the club members and encourages them to employ Emiratis (UAE Government News 2019).

The Minister of Human Resources & Emiratization H.E. Nasser Bin Thani Al Hamli advised that the reasons Emiratis were not successful when applying for jobs included a lack of skills and competence 53%, weak in the English language 25%, did not have the required years of

experience 10% whilst 9% failed to attend the interview. He also stated that the reasons Emiratis rejected jobs were that 32% did not feel that the job or the job site was compatible with their desires, 23% advised that the working hours were unsuitable, 22% did not accept the salary, 13% were not able to join on time whilst 10% did not wish to work in shifts (UAE Government News 2019).

The following interpretations can be drawn from this present study, UAE employers recommend a change in work attitudes by UAE graduates with less focus on salary package and conditions. Additionally, HEIs suggested that along with improving work attitudes students require development in taking accountability and responsibility. In conclusion, employers recommend that HEIs develop strategies to assist graduates to change their work attitudes, to improve their time management and to focus on the learning opportunities offered by the position instead of focusing on the salary package when the graduate is considering their employment choice.

Finding 3 - Life-long Learning

The third significant finding of this study concerned the advice from employers that graduates need to focus on lifelong learning, display the ability to learn and also display the desire to continue learning.

The UAE is a global logistics and trade hub with a sophisticated and advanced progressive economy. In the past five years, the UAE has appointed a Minister for Artificial Intelligence, launched a national smart government plan, announced a 3D printing strategy, is focused on adopting block-chain in all government transactions and is working towards a Hyperloop transportation system, electric vehicles, testing flying taxis, developing space technology

including a focus on the Mars science city strategy. The UAE is an early adopter of futuristic technology and this will influence the skills expected by employers of UAE graduates (Jarrar 2018).

The UAE is one of the more mature education markets in the region and remains a draw for investors, providers and students (PwC 2019). The government is emphasising a reduction in the current dependency on government jobs and promoting the need for private sector participation. Priority sectors include Energy & Petrochemicals, Travel, Tourism and Hospitality, Manufacturing, Trade and Logistics, Financial Services, Technology, Media and Communications, and Construction (PwC 2019).

There are many opportunities for both the Emirati and non-Emirati UAE graduate if they display a willingness to adapt to the new technologies, develop the required skills, continue to learn and display a positive work attitude. Employers will train fresh graduates, but they expect passion for the job together with commitment to lifelong learning and development from the graduate.

Employers believed that if the graduate was flexible and willing to learn that they will be capable of adjusting to the future needs of the enterprise. Employers suggested lifelong learning could be demonstrated by having had productive work experience, useful internships, professional certifications and additional training programs throughout their working life.

E9: “It’s about learning and wanting to learn”.

E21: “What stands out for us is when the candidate tries to make a difference, upgrade her knowledge, improve herself”.

Employers did not really focus on the actual degree specification, major or GPA it was more the desire to continue to learn.

E21: “No, we are taking any degree, we are a technology company, but we need HR, Accounting etc., for now, we are looking for the right person first”.

E11: “We are looking for 2.5 and above but it’s OK if it’s a lower and they have very good English and very good communication skills”.

E14: “GPA is not the main thing”.

The focus on lifelong learning and the willingness to learn was echoed in many international studies as not only a preparation for future job transitions and changes but as an important personal trait for a graduate to display (Harvey 2001). McKinsay Global (2018) surveyed more than three thousand (3,000) business leaders across seven countries and found an emphasis on continual learning to be crucial to most employers. Cole & Tibby (2013) recommended engaging alumni by offering them lifelong learning opportunities as well as asking for their help in mentoring and teaching current students.

In this study, UAE employers also expressed an interest in graduates applying for professional certifications and listing them in their CVs:

E2: “Professional certification is required for certain jobs, Accounting & Finance – CFA, CAC, Legal –LPC and HR – CIPD.

Global research on professional certification cites Daniels (2011) who categorises certification programs as part of lifelong learning as well as part of the educational mix. Similarly, Cumberland et al. (2018) state participation in certification programs is linked to growth and self-development and displays intrinsic motivation. This research found that the UAE employer was very willing

and expected to provide extensive training for the fresh graduate once employed. Many spoke of one- or two-year programs with the expectations that the graduate would be and should be willing to learn.

E10 “We have a one-year training and rotation once they are placed in a job”.

E16: “We will train them, all about our industry”.

The employers in this study also spoke about the actual need for industry experience not being as important when making the decision to employ a UAE graduate as they will provide the required training.

E10 We don’t expect them to have experience when they are a fresh graduate. We hire them without experience.

E27: “We offer development programs for new graduates they are usually two years. The graduate is expected to reach the required skills and work hard”.

With respect to the development of lifelong learning and the maintenance of a learning record, it has been suggested that HEIs, in collaboration with industry, could develop a system of digital badges that remain with the graduate for their entire career. One HEI advised that they were providing online courses on employability and job preparation:

IC1: “...providing online accredited courses and face-to-face workshops”

Digital badges are an emerging technology in education globally as they are a symbol of the achievement of knowledge, skills and competency (Mah et al. 2016), they allow for skills-based curricula and are accessible within and outside the classroom (IMS Global 2019). Digital badges are currently in use or under development at MIT, Carnegie Mellon, Purdue, and within industries

such as NASA, Capital One, and JP Morgan (Purdue 2012). They connect learning pathways between vocational education, higher education and other training providers whilst supporting the concept of lifelong learning (Glover & Latif 2013). For digital badges to be fully effective all stakeholders need to be involved in their development. The badges need to have robust quality processes, be clear and transparent, relevant to industry and have set competency levels (Jovanovi & Devedzic 2015).

The evidence produced by this study suggests lifelong learning is an important employability characteristic to employers, they want to see that the graduate can learn and is willing to continue to learn throughout their career. In conclusion, consistent with developing a positive work ethic, HEIs are expected to develop and instil the desire for lifelong learning within the student's ethos. To undertake this effectively it is suggested that digital badges are beneficial in not only encouraging the acquisition of broad types of learning skills but also in recording the achievements. Further credibility would be added to the digital badge if the learning was supported by assessments so that the badge could display competency. Endorsement by industry would also assist.

Finding 4 - Improved CVs and interview preparation

A further significant finding by this study included the lack of interview preparation demonstrated by graduates. Employer's perceived graduates as being unprepared for interviews, their CVs required development and the graduate did not appear to fully comprehend or understand the recruitment processes and practices. Some employers' views are expressed in the following remarks:

E3: "They need to attend the interview on time. They need to practice with likely questions and be prepared."

“They need to add more details to their CV. Such as when they graduated, what level, what was their GPA, what was their major and the location/Emirate, they wish to work”.

E4: “It’s simple things like, how to dress for the interview, how to present yourself in the interview, make sure that you bring your CV, make sure it’s not scruffy, prepare by doing mock interviews”.

Supporting these views was the MENA research by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation (2018) in which they found three key areas that required addressing 1. Career information/guidance, 2. CV preparation, and 3. The development of soft skills.

When HEIs were questioned during this research about providing CV, interview and recruitment training, each advised that they were currently providing the necessary comprehensive training programs and career counselling however the problem appeared to be the lack of commitment or interest from students. Employers do not perceive graduates as prepared for the recruitment process, they cited that further development was required prior to graduation. This study reached the conclusion based on the information provided by employers and HEIs that graduates require training in CV development, the recruitment process and interview preparation. Whilst HEIs have advised that they currently offer this training it is apparent that it needs to be made mandatory and linked to the digital badge so that all potential graduates emerge from the education system with evidence that they have not only undertaken the training and achieved a particular standard but that the level of competency is also visible to all future employers.

Finding 5 - Improved work placement & internship programs

A significant finding arising from the responses from HEIs is their suggestion that an improvement in the approach and management of work placement, practical experience and internship programs is required as confirmed by the following statement:

IC1: “it needs more planning, work-placement opportunities, internship opportunities, sponsorship opportunities, need to be aligned with labour market needs and become a more in-depth process. If you are offering somebody an internship or work placement it has to be meaningful, there has to be a training plan, somebody needs to be on hand to mentor and coach the student whilst there’re on the work placement or internship. The concept of having the work placement in the graduation year allows the company to use it as pre-induction to the company and reduce recruitment costs, it’s a free test run. On the other hand, students need exposure to the work environment much earlier, particularly if they have not had exposure in high school”.

Alumni also stated that they felt that the current work placement or practical experience programme with employers had not resulted in a positive encounter, nor had it been beneficial.

FA2b: “two months just reading and nothing from 8 to 2 just sitting”.

However, employers advised that they were happy to be actively involved in the work experience programme:

E19: “We take lots of students in our workplace, and during the internship, most of the students have been employed”.

Employers also made recommendations towards improvements in the system of work experience:

E26: “I want the students to have work placement opportunities from year one and every year, so they learn how to be on time and committed to the workplace. Not during summer, it should happen during the semester”.

“It should be two or three months. I recommend 90 days, you can see an achievement or small project, the employer has time to view everything. Eight weeks is not enough. I recommend 90 days at least and every year”.

International studies often cited work experience as a central part of the employability process (York & Knight 2006; Maslen 2019). Griffin & Coelho (2019) in their UAE study advised that students should be provided with pre-placement training that informs them about the general working environment and information about organisational norms, values, work practices culture and what is expected by the employee whilst in the working environment. This training would complement both Finding 1 and Finding 2 concerning the required development of communication skills and attitudes to work.

The implications of these findings are that work placement, work experience and internships are extremely important to the employer. All participants in the process recommend improvements in the program. In conclusion to Finding 5, the study confirmed that work placement, work experience and internship programs are useful and important however they also require significant review and improvement to be fully effective.

Finding 6 - Collaboration

The final significant finding of this study was that employers and HEIs both agreed that there was a requirement for increased and improved collaboration between all employment stakeholders.

One employer stated:

E3: “I am a firm believer in the Triple Helix model. Where the university, industry and the government work together to increase the economic growth. But the graduates need the community to be involved as well as industry, government and the university all working

together to change attitudes and support the new graduates to get work and work experience”.

In a focus group another employer advised:

FE1: “Employers and educators need to change how they work; we need to partner. The skills required for future jobs are changing. I have to continually learn to ensure I am relevant. So, will they. Everything is changing”.

Employers also advised that they were happy to work with universities:

E9: “Universities need to visit corporations and tell us what they are doing and speak to us and listen to us”.

E19: “We need to sit together and discuss the features of the majors. We need to check our job titles and what we need the graduate to do and then ensure they are being taught that at University. Each employer knows what skills they require students to learn”.

HEIs were receptive to the request to collaborate with industry:

FCG2a: “We need to hear from our stakeholders more, meet with employers and students and find out what they need and want. We need to listen more, be flexible and adapt in a practical way”.

IC1: “employer-led workshops with topics such as job interview skills that only take on hour of the employer’s time. Or invite industry to come and speak on an employer panel. Or do a brief networking event or breakfast. The approach is to make it low-level commitment, something that doesn’t require the employer to have done a lot of preparation back at the office before they come”.

In research undertaken by Jarrar (2018) in the GCC, it was recommended that policy conversations between government, employers and educational institutions were required to develop meaningful strategies. The World Economic Forum (2017) recommended in their GCC employability study that a closer alignment is required between the Ministry of Education, current and potential labour, industry and related government agencies. The regions public and private sectors need to work

together to better prepare the future skills base. In their 2018 study WEF asserted policymakers, regulators and educators will play a role in either repurposing skills or retraining the current and future workforce by updating labour to match the realities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

International research by Bolden et al. (2009); Cole & Tibby, (2013); UKCES, (2014) recommend more holistic and integrated approaches by the employer, teaching and business engagement by undertaking activities such as knowledge transfer partnerships, access to specialist facilities, combined curriculum development, collaborative R&D & consultancy, meaningful student placements, current relevant career advice & support and academic placement. Cole & Tibby (2013) also recommend engaging alumni mentors and requesting that they become an integral part of the HEI, involving them in the lifelong learning approach by including them into mentorship programs, offering them invitations to lecture and network with the students whilst also offering them further development workshops. Anastasui et al. (2017) endorses the concept of arranging industry experts to co-teach with professors and work with employers on improving internships and apprenticeships by integrating them within the courses and programs. Cole & Tibby (2013); Knight & York (2004) and QAA (2014) suggested that employability also relates to its societal and economic contribution through the range of stakeholders involved.

The results of this finding indicate that collaboration is required between all stakeholders, in a meaningful accountable approach, that is not only practical but will also provide results to improve the employability of UAE graduates. In conclusion, this finding confirms that improved collaboration of all stakeholders involved in the development of graduate employability would be beneficial.

Limitations

This study was limited by the lack of quantitative data arising from the poor return of employer surveys which sought responses to questions regarding UAE graduate employability. Whilst forty-one in-depth interviews and six focus groups were conducted across all twelve UAE industry sectors this data cannot be generalised. However, the quality of the data collected in the qualitative study provided meaningful information that can aid in the improvement of graduate employability. Another potential limitation in the study is that of researcher bias however to reduce this possibility extensive interviews and focus groups were undertaken until the saturation point of data appeared. The extensive quantity of qualitative data collected was designed to reduce potential bias and to allow for extensive triangulation of the data.

Recommendations

This researcher offers recommendations based upon the findings, analysis and conclusions of this study. The recommendations that follow fall into three categories: (a) recommendations for HEIs, (b) recommendations for all stakeholders working to support UAE graduate employability and (c) recommendations for further research.

Recommendations for HEIs

One of the most important findings arising from this study is the recommendation that all stakeholders throughout the UAE be committed to the development of digital badges to record the credentials and relevant qualifications of all students and graduates nationally. The digital badge should promote lifelong learning both inside and outside the classroom. It should also encourage volunteering, vocational pursuits, formal and informal learning including the pursuit of other

qualifications. Digital badges should also be subject to robust quality processes, be relevant to all stakeholders and include assessments to ascertain competency. The badges should display mandatory components at set stages as well as voluntary sections that display the individual's commitment to lifelong learning.

The badge should also include the recording of the development of soft skills, particularly communication skills, employability skills, job preparation, career development planning, development of positive workplace attitudes, time management as well as training towards the development of a passion for learning. The training courses could be purchased readymade from an international training developer however they need to be at a level that is appropriate for UAE students and graduates. The courses should be easily accessible and supported by all HEIs throughout the UAE. Additionally, all degrees should include employability skills embedded into the technical degree with regular assessments throughout the duration of study. All HEIs should be encouraged through their accreditation audits to provide evidence of additional employability training and support courses to assist students to meet the minimum mandatory requirements necessary for inclusion in the students UAE digital badge.

Recommendations for all UAE stakeholders

All stakeholders, including industry, HEIs, government, parents and community should be encouraged to be represented and collaboratively involved in the development of preparing students, graduates, alumni and employees within the UAE to ensure they can be productive participants in the development of the UAE's knowledge economy. HEIs should take a more active role in promoting and enabling collaboration.

A stakeholder committee should be formed to develop a plan to ensure regular contact and collaboration, including meaningful practical approaches developed to improve the UAE graduate's employability. The education systems need to be aligned with the skills and productivity requirements of each industry sector (Waxin et al. 2018). Employers need to know more about the HEI curriculum, students and the quality of education provided by the HEIs. HEI career services and HEIs need to be involved in industry networks and play a role in them (Cai 2013).

KPIs need to be set with realistic targets that detail practical collaboration between all stakeholders. Further collaborative development is required towards improved internship programs, soft skills development and lifelong learning partnerships. The stakeholder's involvement should be made accountable through audits confirming the level of participation, including evidence of the activities undertaken, with the goal being to establish meaningful collaboration with all stakeholders whilst engaging in activities designed to improve UAE graduate employability.

Recommendations for further research

Further research is essential in order to build a research-led community to improve data collection that will contribute to the formulation of ideas that improve the employability of UAE graduates. Those involved in the research should include all stakeholders specifically government, chambers of commerce, HEIs as well as employers. This research should be readily available and accessible to all interested parties.

The Chambers of Commerce should require each enterprise to report on the current skill levels of newly employed UAE graduates with the aim of recommending areas of graduate training and

development required prior to the annual renewal of the enterprise business licence. Furthermore, the Chambers of Commerce could provide this information in a generalised report to the Ministry of Education (MoE) each year which would inform MoE policy development.

All HEIs should provide reports to the Ministry of Education (MoE) annually on feedback from employers in relation to the areas of required skills development collected whilst both undergraduates and graduates undertake internships, work placement with details on both mandatory and elective courses to be included within digital badges. Additionally, HEIs could regularly survey employers who hire UAE graduates to gauge their perceptions of graduate employability. These research outcomes could be used for developing future policy and direction within HEIs which would enable them to improve the employability of UAE graduates.

As a natural progression from the work undertaken in this study, it is recommended that more in-depth employer interviews be collected and that the data be compared and contrasted with the findings in this research to enable further conclusions regarding UAE graduate employment to be drawn. Furthermore, a quantitative survey endorsed and directed by the government or chambers of commerce could be undertaken with employers. The data collected could further inform HEI curriculum and digital badge development whilst also providing an overview of the areas of focus required in the training of UAE graduates. Finally, an annual employability survey would not only provide longitudinal information but also aid in the development of a national research ethos.

In summary, this research is the first qualitative research that focuses on the issue of employability from the HEIs and Employers perspective whilst also seeking solutions to the problems by undertaking 41 in-depth interviews and 6 focus groups across all 12 industry sectors

and 10 HEIs. The research extends our knowledge of what UAE employers regard as important when employing UAE graduates as well as identifying the main influences that they take into consideration when making decisions regarding the employment of a UAE graduate.

Additionally, the study discussed the initiatives currently implemented by HEIs to improve graduate employability. These initiatives are extensive; however, it is recommended that career counselling, recruitment preparation and soft skill development become mandatory for all students to improve their employability. Additionally, action should be taken by HEIs to ensure full support and collaboration of all stakeholders, specifically the students, the community, government and most importantly the employer all working together in harmony to improve UAE graduate employability.

The findings from this study make a meaningful contribution to the current literature, firstly by obtaining direct qualitative information from the employer regarding their perceptions of UAE graduate employability and secondly by recording the initiatives currently being implemented by UAE HEIs to improve the employability of graduates within the UAE.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Data Collection Plan & Modifications

Stages of the Study	Practical Steps	Time	Modifications made to plan
Submit Research Proposal & await approval	Adapt as required	June 2018	Nil
Seek Ethics approval See Appendix E	Ethical approvals - Submit ethical documents to BUID & Employer	Jun & Jul 18	Delayed - approved 13 August 2018
Strategy/Design (interviews)	Plan interviews Avoid bias Update questions Pilot interview	Aug-Sept 18	Minor changes to interview questions to simplify
Sampling (QUAL - interviews - stratified sampling)	Choose sample Test interview questions & evaluate Evading bias Contact interviewees & arrange consent	Sept-Dec 18	Extended interviews until July 2019
Conduct Interviews See questions in Appendix F	Plan the meetings Conduct the interviews, record and transcribe	Oct-Jun 18	Interviews took longer to secure & transcribe than anticipated Conducted more interviews due to minimal survey responses
Arrange the Focus groups See questions in Appendix G	Contact, arrange and conduct, record and transcribe	Nov-Jan 18	Added more focus groups with HEIs, Employers and Alumni
Data Analysis method (thematic analysis)	Preliminary coding into themes Data analysis Interpretation of the results	Oct – June 18	Time longer than anticipated Updated NVivo 12 software
Pilot survey study	Pilot the survey circulated	Nov 18	Minor changes to survey

Sampling (QUAN - survey – systematic sample) See Appendix C final survey sent	Survey sample Test. Sent three reminder emails to each participant	Dec 18- Jun 19	Minimal responses
Data Collection & Analysis method (survey)	Aborted	June 19	Aborted due to low response rate
Analysis of QUAL responses and amendments as required	Checked Thematic analysis, reviewed Kept memos & journal	May- Jul 19	Missing Agriculture Sector Interviews these were conducted late
Updated Literature Review, Amendments as required		Mar- Jul 19	

Appendix B: Information and Interview Consent form Consent to be part of a Research Study

Title of Project: Investigation of Educational Institutions and Employers Perceptions of the Skills and Work-readiness of UAE graduate Employability

Principal Researcher: Leisa Hassock

My name is Leisa Hassock and I am a postgraduate student studying a PhD in Education - Management and Leadership degree at The British University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to take part in this research project, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. The research project has ethics approval from the Faculty of Education, The British University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Information about the Research Study

The project aims to investigate what employers perceive as most important when employing UAE graduates currently and in the future. Additionally, it is investigating how higher education institutions and employers can work together to ensure the future graduates are employable.

If you choose to take part in the project, you will

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be

The form will be marked with the correct details depending on the request.

- Be asked to participate in an interview;
- Be asked to attend a focus group;
- Be asked to complete an online questionnaire;

The _____ be on _____ at _____. It will take approximately _____ minutes.

If agreed to participate your interview/focus group will be recorded

coded so that your details remain anonymous. Your name and any other information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from the data collected as part of the project. All data collected will be stored securely and after the project has concluded will be confidentially destroyed. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your identity will not be revealed. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request.

I anticipate that there is low risk associated to you by participating in this project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary

Participation in this project is voluntary, you are free to withdraw at any time, and there will be no penalty for doing so. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed the information you have given me will be destroyed. If you would like to participate in the project, you will be asked to sign this consent form that confirms your confidentiality and that you are aware of the project objectives and that your identity will remain confidential and anonymous.

Contact Information for the research team and Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about the research project or require further information, you may contact the following:

Student Researcher: Leisa Hassock

Telephone Number: +971 51470194

Email: 2016121128@student.buid.ac.ae

Supervisor: Dr Christopher Hill

Email: Christopher.hill@buid.ac.ae

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concern about this study with someone other than the researcher, please contact the following:

The British University in Dubai
PO Box 345015
1st & 2nd Floor, Block 11
Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) Dubai, United Arab Emirates
T: +971 4 279 1400
Thank you for your time,

Yours sincerely,



Leisa Hassock 2016121128

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact me using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Printed Name

Signature Date

(adapted from Edith Cowan University and IRB-HSBS general consent template)

Appendix C: Survey Sent to Employers

Employer satisfaction survey with UAE higher education graduates

The main aim of this survey is to investigate the employer's satisfaction with UAE graduates and understand how higher educational institutions and employers could collaborate more effectively to graduates are properly prepared for the work place.

The survey is voluntary and information will not be associated with your company or yourself, all data will be confidential and will contribute towards improving employer satisfaction with UAE graduates. There is only twenty (20) questions and should only take a few minutes to complete.

By agreeing to proceed with the survey you are acknowledging your understanding that the information collected will remain confidential.

In addition to the survey please contact the researcher should you wish to be involved in an in-depth interview so that follow up information can be collected.

Thank you for your participation in this survey.
yours sincerely

Leisa Hassock
2016121127@student.buid.ac.ae

* Required

1. Background questions

1. **How many employees does your company/organisation have in the UAE? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 50
- 51-149
- 150-249
- 250-500
- 500 or more
- Do not know/not applicable

2. **Have you recruited higher education graduates in the last 5 years, or are you planning to recruit higher education graduates in the next 5 years? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Have recruited graduates and plan to recruit more
- Have recruited graduates but not planning to recruit more
- Have not recruited graduates but planning to recruit in the future
- Have not recruited graduates and not planning to recruit in the future

3. What is the ownership structure of your company/organisation? **Mark only one oval.*

- Public sector (government)
- Private sector
- Mixed (combination of both) semi-government

4. What is the main activity of your company? **Mark only one oval.*

- Government services and public administration
- Community, health and social services
- Business, administration and financial services
- Tourism, hospitality, retail and leisure services including personal care services
- Arts, culture and entertainment
- Education, learning and social development
- Building and construction, estates and assets development and management
- Utilities and infrastructure
- Energy resources - oil, natural gas, petrochemical, chemical and mining/quarrying
- Manufacturing
- Logistics and transport
- Agriculture, livestock and fishery
- Other: _____

5. What is your position in your company/organization? **Mark only one oval.*

- HR manager/ HR director/ Head of HR department
- CEO/President/General Manager/Director/Managing Director
- Department Head
- Other: _____

6. In your estimation, what is the overall percentage of higher education graduates from the UAE currently employed in your company?

Check all that apply.

Please check one box

1-10%	<input type="checkbox"/>
11-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>
21-30%	<input type="checkbox"/>
31-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>
41-50%	<input type="checkbox"/>
51-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>
61-70%	<input type="checkbox"/>
71-80%	<input type="checkbox"/>
81-90%	<input type="checkbox"/>
91-100%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Graduate Employability

This portion of the survey addresses questions concerning professional knowledge, understanding, skills, expertise (work/life), generic skills and emotional intelligence.

7. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Higher education graduates recruited in the last year to three years have the skills required to work in my company". *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. How important was the degree specialization and subject knowledge of the graduate when deciding to employ them? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very important
- Rather important
- Somewhat important
- Not important at all
- Other: _____

9. Please rate the following skills in terms of importance how when recruiting higher education graduates in your company *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Very important	Rather important	Rather unimportant	Not important at all	Not applicable
Good English communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good Arabic communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical thinking and problem solving skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity and entrepreneurial mindset	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective people management skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to coordinate others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Able to take constructive feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to learn new skills and motivated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good informational technology skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adaptable and flexible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Able to work on ones own and manager time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attentive to details	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Able to work under pressure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manages time well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional Intelligence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. In your opinion, in the next 5-10 years which skills will be the most important for new higher education graduates? Please choose the five most important ones.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Most important (1)	Second importance	Third importance	Fourth importance	Fifth importance
Good Arabic communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good English communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good written and verbal communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complex problem solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good time management skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Basic skills such as being good with numbes, good reading and writing skills and computer skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ability to coordinate others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity and entrepreneurial mindset	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sector-specific skills (expertise skills)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Decision-making skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teamworking skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning and organisational skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to adapt to and act in new situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competent in using technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Willingness to learn new skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. In your opinion how would you rate the following emotional intelligence traits when considering hiring UAE graduates? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Very important	Rather important	Rather unimportant	Not important at all	Not applicable
Having the ability to understand and recognize their own feelings and the feelings of others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having the ability to be self-motivated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having the ability to manage ones own emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding other peoples emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having empathy with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. In your opinion how would you rate the following reflection and evaluation traits when considering hiring UAE graduates? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Very important	Rather important	Rather unimportant	Not important at all	Not applicable
Self-efficacy - having a belief in one's own capacity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-confidence - confidence in self	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-esteem - belief in one's ability to succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. **Having hired a new graduate, what are the main skills gaps that requires you to provide further training? Please rank them in order of where the most skills gaps occur to the least.**
Mark only one oval per row.

	Most often skills gap (1)	Second skills gap (2)	Third skills gap (3)	Forth skills gap (4)	Fifth skills gap (5)
Communication skills - spoken, written, reading and writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional Intelligence - self confidence, ability to work with others and adapt to situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time management, job description understanding and motivation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building a creativity and entrepreneurial mindset	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Awareness of business etiquette, hierarchy, data security and confidentiality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technical and job specific skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. **When offering training for your new staff, do you provide ***
Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes	No	Not applicable
A graduate training program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training and development programmes in-house (in the workplace)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Short courses/modules offered by higher education institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Part-time study programmes at higher education instiutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online or distance learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Short course offered by different providers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional certification training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Recruitment

15. How important are each of the following factors in recruiting more or fewer graduates *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Very important	Rather important	Not important at all	Not applicable
Anticipated growth in business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Actual growth in business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High turnover of staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increasing complexity of tasks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
UAE Emirati quota	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
It is very important that a new recruit is willing to learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A new recruit should have done some volunteering before joining the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A new recruit should have extensive (1-2 years) work experiences prior to joining this organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is very important the new recruit has had some work experience prior to joining the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. When considering hiring graduates, what are the greatest challenges you face in filling your vacancies? Please select the two most important ones.

Check all that apply.

	First choice	Second choice
Shortage of applicants with the right skills and capabilities in the UAE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The graduate lack of desire to work in the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offering a competitive salary and conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offering a competitive graduate training and development programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Communication and cooperation with Higher Education Institutions

18. What do you think is the best way to cooperate with higher education institutions? Please select your top three preferred ways to cooperate.

Mark only one oval per row.

	First answer	Second answer	Third answer
Participate in seminars or conferences organised by higher education institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal discussion with study program director, curriculum team or teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Answering surveys	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct recruitment from the institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cooperation with the career centres	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participation in the internship programme with higher education institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Which actions should higher education institutions take in order to improve the employability of their graduates? Please select your top three choices.

Mark only one oval per row.

	First choice	Second choice	Third choice
Make courses more relevant to the needs of employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Include practical experience in courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Include sector specific work placements as an integral part of the study programme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide better post-graduation support (facilitate relations between graduates and companies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A structured sector-specific internship program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quarterly industry advisory meetings between industry and higher institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seminars and workshops partnered within industry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Industry guest speakers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not Applicable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix D: Introductory email for Survey

Email 1

Subject: Research on Employer's satisfaction with UAE graduates

Dear UAE Employer,

Currently, I am undergoing research to investigate the employer's satisfaction with Higher Education Institution (HEI) UAE graduates. Additionally, I am investigating how higher education institutions and employers could collaborate more effectively so graduates are prepared for the workplace.

Could you please complete a quick survey? The survey is voluntary and information will not be associated with your company or yourself, all data will be confidential and will contribute to improving employer satisfaction with UAE graduates. There are only twenty (20) questions and should only take a few minutes to complete.

The link to the survey is [here](#)

By agreeing to proceed with the survey, you are acknowledging your understanding that the information collected will remain confidential.

In addition to the survey, please contact the researcher should you wish to be involved in an in-depth interview so that follow up information can be collected.

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Leisa Hassock

2016121127@student.buid.ac.ae

Email 2

Subject: Research on Employer's satisfaction with UAE graduates

Dear UAE Employer,

Second gentle reminder

Currently, I am undergoing research to investigate the employer's satisfaction with UAE graduates and understand how higher education institutions and employers could collaborate more effectively so graduates are prepared for the workplace.

Could you please complete a quick survey? The survey is voluntary and information will not be associated with your company or yourself, all data will be confidential and will contribute to improving employer satisfaction with UAE graduates. There are only twenty (20) questions and should only take a few minutes to complete.

The link to the survey is [here](#)

By agreeing to proceed with the survey, you are acknowledging your understanding that the information collected will remain confidential.

In addition to the survey, please contact the researcher should you wish to be involved in an in-depth interview so that follow up information can be collected.

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Leisa Hassock

2016121127@student.buid.ac.ae

Email 3

Subject: Research on Employer's satisfaction with UAE graduates

Dear UAE Employer,

Third Gentle reminder

Currently, I am undergoing research to investigate the employer's satisfaction with UAE graduates and understand how higher education institutions and employers could collaborate more effectively so graduates are prepared for the workplace.

Could you please complete a quick survey? The survey is voluntary and information will not be associated with your company or yourself, all data will be confidential and will contribute to improving employer satisfaction with UAE graduates. There are only twenty (20) questions and should only take a few minutes to complete.

The link to the survey is [here](#)

By agreeing to proceed with the survey, you are acknowledging your understanding that the information collected will remain confidential.

In addition to the survey, please contact the researcher should you wish to be involved in an in-depth interview so that follow up information can be collected.

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Leisa Hassock

2016121127@student.buid.ac.ae

Appendix E: Approved ethics consent form



Research Research Ethics Form (Low Risk Research)

To be completed by the researcher and submitted to the Dean's nominated faculty representative on the Research Ethics Committee

i. Applicants/Researcher's information:

Name of Researcher /student	Leisa Hassock
Contact telephone No.	+971 551470194
Email address	2016121128@student.buid.ac.ac
Date	26/6/2018

ii. Summary of Proposed Research:

<p>BRIEF OUTLINE OF PROJECT (100-250 words; this may be attached separately. You may prefer to use the abstract from the original bid):</p>	<p>The purpose of this research is to investigate the Higher Education institutions (HEI) and employer's perceptions of the skills and work-readiness of the UAE graduate employability. This study will investigate the primary factors an employer considers when making the decision to employ UAE graduates and whether employers perceive graduates to be adequately prepared and work ready. It will focus on what current and future skills and work-readiness the employers perceive to be most important to ensure the</p>
	<p>graduate is employable. It will investigate what strategies the employers and educational institutions could implement to improve graduate employability. The approach taken by the research is to provide a holistic understanding of employer perceptions through reviewing qualitative and quantitative indicators of employability from the employer's perspective. The data collected in this study will support the</p>

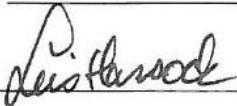
	development of planning and strategic decision-making. Data will be collected: through in-depth interviews with employers in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Dubai. A focus group will be held at three university campuses and a survey will be administered to employers by phone or email to the company.
MAIN ETHICAL CONSIDERATION(S) OF THE PROJECT (e.g. working with vulnerable adults; children with disabilities; photographs of participants; material that could give offence etc...):	Confidentiality of the information gained from the specific respondents will be assured and the researcher will ensure nothing that is business confidential or commercial in confidence data is disclosed. The research will ensure specific companies are not linked to specific data and ensure the data is only sector related. The researcher will ensure confidentiality in regard to the identity of the people interviewed & surveyed and the data collected will be held in a secure location.
DURATION OF PROPOSED PROJECT (please provide dates as month/year):	1 July 2018 to 1 November 2019
Date you wish to start Data Collection:	1 July 2018
Date for issue of consent forms:	1 July 2018

iii. Declaration by the Researcher:

I have read the University's policies for Research and the information contained herein, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate.

I am satisfied that I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations as researcher and the rights of participants. I am satisfied that members of staff (including myself) working on the project have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached document and that I, as researcher take full responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research in accordance with subject-specific and University Research Policy (9.3 Policies and Procedures Manual), as well as any other condition laid down by the BUiD Ethics Committee. I am fully aware of the timelines and content for participant's information and consent.

Print name: Leisa Hassock

Signature:  Date: 26.6.18

If the research is confirmed as not medium or high risk, it is endorsed HERE by the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee member (following discussion and clarification of any issues or concerns)*.....JMK.....and forwarded to the Research Office to be recorded.

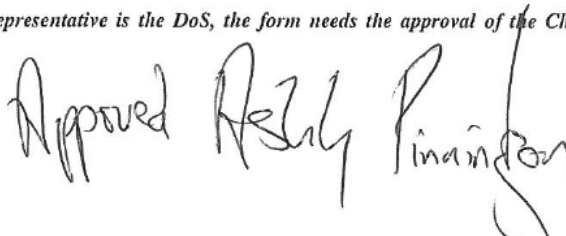
I confirm that this project fits within the University's Research Policy (9.3 Policies and Procedures Manual) and I approve the proposal on behalf of BUIID's Research Ethics Committee.

Name and signature of nominated Faculty Representative: JOHN MC KENNY

Signature:  Date: 5/8/2018

- iv. If the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee member or the Vice Chancellor considers the research of medium or high risk, it is forwarded to the Research Ethics Officer to follow the higher-level procedures.

* If the Faculty representative is the DoS, the form needs the approval of the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee.

Approved 
13 August '18

Appendix F: Employer Interview questions & Focus group general plan Employer Questions

UAE Graduates

1. Have you employed a UAE Higher Education Institution (HEI) Graduate before?
 - a. What did you consider as important when employing the graduate?
 - b. Did they have the skills you required?
 - c. Were they work-ready or did they require further training?
 - d. If so what training was required?
 - e. What further skills would have been beneficial for your organisation?
 - f. Do you provide further training for all new staff? If so what is it?
 - g. If only for graduates why do you think it is specifically required for them?

Specific Work Skills & Work-readiness

2. Currently, what specific skills and work-readiness competencies do you see as most important?
3. Do you have general specific skills and work readiness competencies for all jobs? If so, what are they?
4. Are there specific skills and work readiness competencies for specific jobs? If so, what are they?
5. In relation to the future, what skill and work-readiness competencies do you expect will be most important for your company?
6. Regarding the future. What skills and work-readiness competencies do you perceive would be most important during the next year?
7. What about the next two years?
8. What about in five years' time?

The employment decision

9. When deciding to employ any new staff what are the factors you consider?

Future workforce requirements

10. What changes do you foresee will be required by the workforce in the future?

Collaboration with Higher Education

11. Do you think it would be beneficial to work with Higher Education institutions to ensure the future UAE graduates are work-ready?
12. What do you perceive the Higher Education institution could do to ensure the future UAE graduates are work-ready?
13. Are you aware of the current work placement programs?
14. Is work placement effective for the employer? What makes it effective or how could it be more effective?

Appendix G: HEI Focus group questions

Focus Group

1. Can you describe your institution, what does it teach? How many students do you have who graduate each year, what differentiates you from other HEIs? What do you perceive you do well?
2. Would you suggest your graduating students are work-ready?
3. What does your institution currently do to prepare students to become work-ready?
4. Which areas do you feel could be improved to make the students more work-ready?
5. How do you work with industry to ensure the graduates have the skills, competencies and experience to be relevant, work-ready and employable?
6. Are you aware of the National Qualifications and Careers Handbook for UAE Nationals? Do you think it is relevant, current and a useful document?
7. What effect do you perceive the changes to the international student visa will have at your institution?
8. What do you perceive the future employers could do to ensure UAE graduates are work-ready?

Appendix H: Interview and Focus group Data
Summary of Employer in-depth semi- Interviews

Sector Number	UAE Industry Sector	Code	UAE/GCC or International	Emirates operating in	Public/Private
1.	Government services and public administration	E10	UAE	Fujairah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah	Government
		E19	UAE	Abu Dhabi	Government
**2.	Community, health, and social services	E4	UAE	Abu Dhabi	UAE Government
		E20	UAE	Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah	Private
**3.	Business, administration and financial services	E7	UAE	Abu Dhabi	Public (100% Government)
		E11	UAE/GCC & International	All Emirates	Public Company (60% Government 40% Private)
		E12	International 12 countries	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public Company (International)
		E13	International 158 countries	Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah,	Public Company (International)
		E16	UAE/GCC	Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah	Private Company

**4.	Tourism, hospitality, retail and leisure services including personal care services	E1 E6 E23	International 15 countries UAE UAE	Abu Dhabi Saudi Abu Dhabi & Dubai Abu Dhabi	Public Company (International) Public Company (75% Government 25% Private) Government
5.	Art, culture and entertainment	E17 E24	UAE UAE	Abu Dhabi Abu Dhabi	Private Company Public (100% Government)
6.	Education, learning and social development	E8 E25 E28	UAE & International UAE UAE & International	Abu Dhabi All Emirates Dubai	Public Company (International) Public (100% Government) Private (100%)
*7.	Building & construction, estates and assets development and management	E2 E15	International 30 countries GCC/International	Abu Dhabi Dubai	Government Public Company (International)
*8.	Utilities & infrastructure (including telecommunications), electricity,	E5	International 40 countries including	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public Company (International)

	engineering services, gas, science and mathematics, utilities support and water.	E9	GCC/ International 100 countries	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public Company (International)
*9.	Energy resources – oil, natural gas, petrochemical, chemical and mining/quarrying, renewable & sustainable energy	E22 E27	UAE UAE & Saudi Arabia	Abu Dhabi & Sharjah Abu Dhabi, Dubai	Private (100%) Government
*10.	Manufacturing, design and innovation manufacturing, process and assembly manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology	E14 E21	GCC/International Abu Dhabi	Dubai Abu Dhabi	Public Company (International) Private
*11.	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing	E3 E18 E26	GCC/International Abu Dhabi & International	Abu Dhabi & Dubai Dubai & Abu Dhabi Abu Dhabi	Public Company Public Company Public (International)
12.	Agriculture, livestock & fishery	E29 E30			

Note: * are the key sectors the government expects growth (Ministry of Presidential Affairs/ NQA, p.25 2012), ** are the secondary sectors that expect growth.

UAE Industry Sectors

Sector Number	UAE Industry Sector
1.	Government services and public administration
**2.	Community, health, and social services
**3.	Business, administration, and financial services
**4.	Tourism, hospitality, retail, and leisure services including personal care services
5.	Art, culture and entertainment
6.	Education, learning and social development
*7.	Building & construction, estates and assets development and management
*8.	Utilities & infrastructure (including telecommunications), electricity, engineering services, gas, science and mathematics, utilities support and water
*9.	Energy resources – oil, natural gas, petrochemical, chemical and mining/quarrying, renewable & sustainable energy
*10.	Manufacturing, design and innovation manufacturing, process and assembly manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology
*11.	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing
12.	Agriculture, livestock & fishery

Ref: Occupations & Careers Handbook for UAE Nationals 2012 (NQA, 2012).

Note: * are the key sectors the government expects growth (Ministry of Presidential Affairs/ NQA, pp. 2012), ** are the secondary sectors that expect growth.

Employer Interview Summary

Code	UAE, GCC or International	UAE Industry Sector	Emirates operating	Public or Private
E1	UAE & International	Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Leisure (4)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E2	UAE & International	Building & Construction, Estates & Assets Development (7)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E3	UAE & International	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing (E11)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E4	UAE & International	Community, Health & Social Services (2)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E5	UAE & International	Utilities & Infrastructure, electricity, Engineering, Utilities & Water (8)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E6	UAE	Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Leisure (4)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (75% Government)
E7	UAE	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (100% Government)
E8	UAE & International	Education, Learning & Social Dev. (6)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E9	UAE & International	Utilities & Infrastructure, electricity, Engineering, Utilities & Water (8)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E10	UAE	Government Services & Public Admin (1)*	Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah	Government
E11	UAE, GCC & International	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	All	Public (60% Government)
E12	UAE & International	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)

E13	UAE & International	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)
E14	UAE, GCC & International	Manufacturing, Design & Innovation (10)*	Dubai	Public (International)
E15	UAE, GCC & International	Building & Construction, Estates & Assets Development (7)*	Dubai	Public (International)
E16	UAE & GCC	Business, Admin & Financial Services (3)*	Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah	Private
E17	UAE	Art, Culture & Entertainment (5)*	All	Private
E18	UAE, GCC & International	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services, passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing (11)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Public (International)
E19	UAE	Government Services & Public Admin (1)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E20	UAE	Community, Health & Social Services (2)*	Abu Dhabi & Sharjah	Private
E21	UAE	Manufacturing, Design & Innovation (10)*	Abu Dhabi	Private
E22	UAE	Energy Resources - Oil, Gas, Renewable & Sustainable Energy (9)*	Abu Dhabi & Sharjah	Private
E23	UAE	Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Leisure (4)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E24	UAE	Art, Culture & Entertainment (5)*	Abu Dhabi	Government
E25	UAE	Education, Learning & Social Dev. (6)*	All	Government
E26	UAE & International	Logistics & transport, aviation, aerospace, air transport, maritime, supply chain services,	Abu Dhabi	Public (International)

		passenger conveyance and storage and warehousing (11)*		
E27	UAE & GCC	Energy Resources - Oil, Gas, Renewable & Sustainable Energy (9)*	Abu Dhabi & Dubai	Government
E28	UAE & International	Education, Learning & Social Dev. (6)*	Dubai	Private
E29	UAE	Agriculture, Livestock & Fishery (12)*	Abu Dhabi	Private
E30	UAE	Agriculture, Livestock & Fishery (12)*	Dubai	Public

* UAE Industry Sector Number