

**Choosing a career in Saudi Arabia:
The role of structure and agency in young
people's perceptions of technical and
vocational education**

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I, Hanaa Almoaibed confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that it has been indicated in the thesis.

Hanaa Almoaibed

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At the beginning of my PhD journey I made a batch of fresh lemonade for my son's school's summer fair that became somewhat of a signature of mine. As it turns out, the skill of making lemonade is a transferable one! I have been blessed with incredible support without which I would not have been able to contend with life's metaphorical lemons over the past four(ish) years.

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Abstract

Although the Saudi education system has provided an opportunity to pursue varying pathways for young people, there is a limited understanding of young people's post-secondary education and employment trajectories in Saudi Arabia. Challenges to implementing educational strategies and reforms include a large youth population, diverse stakeholders, economic diversification and limited education and employment opportunities. With the launch of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, education and labour policy efforts included an expansion to the vocational education and training (TVET) sector to stimulate economic growth and increase the employment of young Saudi citizens in place of foreign employees. However, the relatively low enrolment in vocational education and training (TVET) and its weak status can provide insight into the way young people make decisions about their education to work transitions and highlights a variety of individual and structural challenges young people continuously negotiate in the rapidly changing country.

Quantitative empirical research studies fall short in explaining the motivations behind young people's choices and the extent to which choice is available. This research addresses this gap, employing a qualitative constructivist methodology. Through 18 focus groups and 16 individual interviews, this thesis shares the sentiments of 152 young men and women in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia who were enrolled in initial TVET as well as secondary students at a transition point where TVET became an option. The findings indicate that 'choice' is often illusory, as youth aspirations are not always in line with opportunities and are influenced by the dominant characteristics of the education pathways and the labour market. Young people are influenced by embedded cultural factors such as social networks, family and gender. In making choices that are socially acceptable, young people minimise potential risks and social sanctions by 'colouring within the lines' of social acceptability rather than re-drawing them.

Impact statement

This thesis explores the way young people navigate their educational and career transitions in Saudi Arabia, a context that has been under researched in academic literature. One aim of the research was to bring the voices of young people to light and explore aspirations and perceptions through an in-depth analysis of their stories and lived experiences. As Saudi Arabia forges ahead with its social reforms that were introduced in 2016, an understanding of the diverse elements of Saudi society, and the impact of these on perceptions will help illuminate areas where reform proves challenging, and potential ways to overcome them.

This contributes to academic literature related to Saudi Arabia specifically and other countries within the Arabian Gulf region and the Islamic World. While most of the research conducted in Saudi Arabia is quantitative in nature, this research utilised qualitative tools to collect rich data and analyse it using themes generated by the participants. The findings can be built on for future sociological research, especially in countries beyond the industrialised world undergoing economic and social reforms. The research illuminates some of the social dimensions that are necessary for our understanding of the experiences of women and young people from a more intersectional perspective. Furthermore, the research contributes to the body of literature that explores choice in education, with specific emphasis on the social meanings attributed to vocational training and education.

Beyond academia, my research has contributed to public policy design, and can continue to inform policy related to young people and vocational education in Saudi Arabia. In August 2018 I co-authored a document mapping the current obstacles to implementing vocational education in secondary schools Saudi Arabia. This was part of a project commissioned by the Ministry of Education and was used as a springboard for a series of workshops that were implemented in secondary schools across the country. My involvement ensured that students were consulted in the process of selecting workshop themes. It also contributed to the idea that perceptions of TVET stemmed from a multitude of social and institutional factors, including routes to employment. As a result other government institutes were identified as essential actors in the process of re-designing TVET pathways.

As a result of my research I intend to pursue a career where my research can continue to influence policy. Within Saudi Arabia, there are a select few think tanks that are involved in the process of evidence-based policy publications. This research is conducted in Saudi Arabia with scholars from around the world and are widely read by

policymakers. Unfortunately, the number of Saudi scholars working in these research hubs with a social science focus is low. I believe that my experience at UCL has equipped me with the expertise to conduct meaningful research that is reflexive and critical and has enabled me to see the value in using evidence that is situated in broader global debates to identify gaps in our understanding of global phenomena and their local implications.

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List of abbreviations

CDE	Career development and education
CDSI	Central department of statistics and information
CIA	Central intelligence agency
COE	International Colleges of Excellence
COT	College of Technology
CPC	Saudi Aramco college preparatory centre
GaStat	General authority for statistics
GCC	Gulf cooperation council
GDP	Gross domestic product
CEDA	Saudi Council of Economic and Development Affairs
GOTVET	General Organisation for Technical Education and Vocational Training
GPA	Grade point average
HCT	Human capital theory
HRDF	Human resources development fund
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KFUPM	King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals
KSU	King Saud University
MCIT	Saudi Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
MEP	Ministry of economy and planning
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOL	Ministry of Labour
OECD	Organisation for economic co-operation and development
PISA	Program for international student assessment
SPSP	Saudi Petrochemical Services Polytechnic
TIMSS	Trends in international mathematics and science study
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
TVTC	Technical and Vocational
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNESCO	United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization
UNEVOC	United Nations international centre for technical and vocational education and training
PEEC	Saudi public education evaluation commission

Glossary of terms

Afaq/ horizons plan	A ministry of education plan consisting of 40 programs set to be achieved by 2029
Al Ahsa	The Eastern region of Saudi Arabia
Al Saud	The ruling family of Saudi Arabia
Arabian peninsula	The largest peninsula in the world consisting of the following countries: Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Bordered by the Red Sea to the West and the Arabian/Persian Gulf to the East.
Aramco	The Saudi Arabian oil company, a national oil and gas company with the world's second largest proven oil reserves.
Bedouins	The Arabic term for tribal nomads
Colleges of Technology	The official title of government technical and vocational colleges at the tertiary level for men and women (COT)
Guanxi	A Chinese word meaning 'a relationship between two people who are expected to give as they get'.
Gulf cooperation council	A council of Arabian Gulf states: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait
Hijaz	The Western region of Saudi Arabia
International colleges of excellence	A type of government technical and vocational college that offers courses in partnership with international technical and vocational colleges
Islam	An Abrahamic monotheistic religion revealed by prophet Mohammed, a messenger revealing that there is one god
Kuttabs	Islamic religious scholars delivering a traditional form of education in mosques, focusing on teaching basic maths, literacy and Quran.
Majlis al Shura	The Saudi consultative council, a unicameral council with 150 seats; members appointed by the monarch to serve 4-year terms
Muqararat system	A modular secondary system that was piloted in 2004/5 and was gradually rolled out over several years in different secondary schools and will be standardised across all schools by 2019-20.
Najd	The Central region of Saudi Arabia
National Transformation Program	One of the 13 Vision 2030 realisation programs established to achieve the objectives of Vision 2030
NVivo	A qualitative data analysis software

Qiyas	The Saudi national centre for assessment; an affiliate centre of the education training evaluation commission
Qudurat test	A standardised test known in English as the General Aptitude Test (GAT), designed as a filtration mechanism for university admissions.
Quran	An Arabic text considered the central religious text of Islam
Sabic	The Saudi Arabian basic industries corporation, a public company based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and one of the world's largest petrochemical manufacturers.
Secondary industrial institutes	The official title of secondary industrial/vocational institutes for young men
Sharia law	Islamic law derived from the Quran and the teachings of the prophet Mohammed.
Shia	The second largest of the two main sects of Islam, constituting about 10% of all Muslims. The word Shia is derived from the Arabic word 'shiat' meaning 'the party of' (BBC, 2016).
Sunni	The largest of the two main sects of Islam, constituting about 90% of all Muslims. The word sunni is derived from the Arabic word 'sunna' meaning tradition (BBC, 2016).
Tatweer education holding	A private Saudi holding company established to manage education reforms in parallel to the Ministry of Education.
Ulama	Islamic religious scholars
Vision 2030	A development plan launched in 2016 with 96 strategic objectives and 13 Vision Realisation Programs (VRPs) established by the Saudi CEDA. The VRPs are: Quality of life program, Financial sector development program, Housing program, Fiscal balance program, National transformation program, Public investment fund program, Privatisation program, National companies promotion program, National industrial development and logistics program, Strategic partnership program.
Wahhabism	A strict interpretation of Sunni Islamic law established by Mohammed bin Abdulwahhab, based on the teachings of the Sunni scholar Ibn Hanbal.
Wasta	An Arabic word that literally means 'mediator' referring to a system of reciprocal support and favours.

Chapter 1. Introduction

As young people encounter choices in times of life transitions, they are often met with excitement, uncertainty, (Ryan, 2001, p. 34), and pressure to skilfully navigate this “turbulent phase” (Schoon and Silbereisen, 2009a, p. 3). For many, educational transition periods highlight aspirations and opportunities, but also limitations related to individual choices and social constraints (Evans and Helve, 2013). As the world of work continues to change and adapt to new models of employment and a greater reliance on digital technology and artificial intelligence, traditional definitions of career pathways and skills are challenged, and the widening range of opportunities is met with anticipation, confusion and more uncertainty. The expansion of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector has been a widespread response to these changes by governments across the globe in an effort to accelerate job readiness and employability. In the developing world, the shifting demands of the global economy dominate policy agendas as countries strive for relevance and a competitive edge in the global marketplace, building new educational frameworks and superimposing global standards of success on their national education systems (Ball, 2012; Mohamed and Morris, 2019; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

Increased access to information and social media bring the global to the doorsteps of young individuals, and the prospects for young people’s future work reach far beyond the borders of their localities. At the same time, local struggles ranging from gendered and classed norms, racial and religious inequalities, to the everyday challenges of managing daily relationships shape future outlooks and aspirations (Furlong and Woodman, 2015). It is against this backdrop that young people around the world form their aspirations of future work and consider the educational academic and training pathways that may allow them to secure their livelihoods and find meaningful work. However, in addition to economic demands, an individual’s ability to choose can be restricted by physical and social barriers that are often so deeply embedded in social

practices and cultural norms that they go unchallenged. Decisions are delineated by social background, access to information, financial resources, gender and culturally defined obligations and responsibilities (Evans, 2007). Unravelling patterns of privilege that are reinforced through the terms used to define educational pathways and enduring institutional and social definitions of qualifications illuminate inequitable educational routes. Understanding how these patterns vary across contexts paints a clearer picture of the various faces of privilege and inequality globally, opening up the possibility for young people to challenge restrictive structures and chart new education and career ambitions.

1.1.1.1 *Employment patterns in Saudi Arabia: A statistical snapshot*

Much of the research on the experience of young people's education-to-work transitions focuses on industrialised economic states and examines the nature of opportunity, social structures, and the ensuing decision-making processes. The elaborate national employment policies of Saudi Arabia, an industrialising country which has spent large sums of money on labour market strategies in efforts to encourage specific employment patterns, presents an opportunity to examine ways that choice unfolds in a context different to industrialised economic settings. Saudi Arabia's youth population dominates its demographic profile as 46.4% of Saudis are under the age of 15 (CDSI, 2015), bringing youth education-to-work transitions to the forefront of its national concerns. Available statistics paint a murkey picture of the current labour market.

- In 2015, only 46.9% of the overall Saudi labour force was made up of Saudi nationals, and despite efforts to increase the employment of Saudis, this figure went down to 42% in 2018 (CDSI, 2015, p. 15)¹.

¹ Considering the economic reforms, this number is counter-intuitive and there is no government issued justification for it. It could be attributed to reporting inaccuracies. In 2019 the Saudi Central Statistics Agency also reported that an estimated 1.6 foreigners left the Saudi labour market in 2018 (Jadwa Investment, 2019).

- 90% of the Saudi labour force is male, and only 10% is female (GaStat, 2019b).
- The majority of the workforce in Saudi Arabia is made up of foreign nationals who are temporarily in the country on time-bound and company sponsored visas. These workers tend to occupy the majority of blue-collar jobs across all sectors, especially construction and retail, and a decreasing number of administrative and managerial jobs, mainly in the private sector.
- On average and across the private and public sectors, foreigners get paid a little more than one third the average salary of a Saudi citizen (GaStat, 2019b).
- Official reports estimate that 66% of employed Saudis worked in the public sector in 2015, which was reduced to 45% by 2018² (GaStat, 2019b; MEP, 2015, p. 46).
- The majority of employed Saudis work in administrative jobs.
- The public wage bill constituted 40% of government spending in 2015 (Al Sweilem, 2015, p. 4)³.

Manufacturing and construction are some of the most unpopular sectors for Saudis (See Appendix 3), and less than 10% of both job seekers as well as employed Saudis hold intermediate technical or vocational certificates (MEP, 2015, p. 43). By 2018, the percentage of employed people with technical specialisations rose by just three percentage points to 13% (GaStat, 2019b). Despite education and labour market incentives and reforms to encourage more employment of citizens in such fields (HRDF, 2011; MOL, 2013), Saudis have not responded according to government expectations and the unemployment rate for Saudi males (between 20 and 24 years old) was officially estimated at 45% in 2015. This has decreased slightly to 36.6% in 2018 (CDSI, 2015, p. 18; Jadwa Investment, 2019)⁴. This unemployment rate is still considered high

² Some estimates put 80% of Saudis in the public sector workforce (Al Sweilem, 2015, p. 4).

³ There are no official numbers reported for this in 2018.

⁴ The overall unemployment rate for Saudis is 11.6% (38.8% of whom are males and 61.2% females). The highest unemployment bracket for all Saudis is between 25-29 years old was estimated at 37.7% (CDSI, 2015, p. 18).

comparatively, as the OECD reports that the youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) in 2018 was lowest in Japan where 3.7% of the youth labour force were unemployed, and the highest rate was in South Africa estimated at 53.4%, but most countries fell between a range of 7% to 20% (OECD, 2019).

Missing from these statistics is information about how and why individuals choose different paths or engage in public or private employment, what barriers they may encounter and how dispositions are formulated. The predominance of quantitative research has led to a policy-driven understanding of educational and career choices through patterns and large-scale data, but one devoid of the individual stories and diverse themes that produce these patterns and facilitate or prevent choice.

1.1.1.2 *Strengthening links between education and work*

As part of a long history of policy interventions and development strategies, Saudi Arabia launched “Vision 2030” in April 2016, a reform strategy that marked a watershed moment in economic and structural changes for Saudi Arabia, after which rapid social, economic and educational changes ensued (Saudi Gazette, 2015). High youth unemployment, a growing young population, lower oil prices, and an increasingly unstable geopolitical scene⁵ are cited as reasons the country has embarked on efforts to diversify the economy, lower public spending bills through privatizing institutions, and reduce dependency on internal foreign labour through policies that bolster existing Saudisation⁶ plans (The Economist, 2016). The social, political and economic changes that have

⁵ Some of the geopolitical issues that are referred to are the Arab Spring that began in 2011, instability of oil markets, the war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, increasing sectarian differences and the related political tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran (The Economist, 2016).

⁶ *Saudisation* is the government policy to increase the number of Saudi nationals in the workforce. In 1994 *Shura Council* Resolution No. 50 required companies with 20 employees or more to increase nationals in their company by 5% annually. In 2002 the requirement changed to 30% of employees in these companies. In 2004 a labour law issued by royal decree required employers' workforces to comprise of 75% Saudis. Exceptions can be made depending on circumstances through the Ministry of Labour (Fayad *et al.*, 2012, p. 31).

followed the introduction of Vision 2030 cannot be ignored, as many enduring governing institutions have been completely transformed. Kinninmont (2017) highlights many of these changes and the resulting challenges within the state-controlled economic and social spaces. She emphasises that although the reforms would have been more effective if implemented over a longer timescale, they had previously been avoided because of presumed costs for political stability. However, despite the dramatic changes, policies are applied in a traditional top-down approach.

One of the priorities outlined in the Vision 2030 is to draw stronger links between education and economic development. The move to a knowledge-based economy has been widely discussed as a mechanism to shift away from a natural resource-based economy through increased education (Wiseman, Alromi and Alshumrani, 2014). Another effort is unfolding through increased investments in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The national strategy⁷ has set goals to lower unemployment and achieve higher economic diversification (MEP 2015, p. 89), while falling in line with the global push toward a 'knowledge economy' (Al Ohali and Al Aqili, 2009, p. 740; Ball, 1998, p. 122; MEP, 2013; MEP, 2015, p. 89).

As countries strive to remain competitive in the contemporary global marketplace, many governments, especially those in the developing world, are using education as a mechanism to achieve a competitive edge to deal with global economic shifts and pressures (Jones, 2009, p. 145; Powell, 2005, p. 1). The United Nations International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) defines TVET as, "Education that provides individuals with relevant skills to the world of work, contributes to their social well-being and that of their families, communities and their societies" (UNEVOC, 2015). In light of this definition, Saudi Arabia's investments in

⁷ "Military and security services has been allocated 25 percent of the budget, the largest among all allocations. Education is allocated the second biggest share, at 23 percent of total spending, followed by the health and social affairs with 13 percent" (Jadwa, 2015).

TVET reflect an effort to increase the skills of nationals so that they can replace foreign workers (the process known as Saudisation), and ultimately reduce youth unemployment.

1.1.1.3 *'Discover your passion, create your future': questioning the availability of choice*

I embarked on this research with an understanding of the Saudi transition field that was framed by an economic policy narrative that emphasised maximum utilisation of 'human assets'. I interpreted the available employment and education statistics as being indicative of a youth population that was ill-informed and misguided. I was eager to find solutions and career development strategies that would help young people identify their strengths early in their lives, and design skills-development programs and on-the-job training opportunities to enhance employability. Not surprisingly, my data exposed the limits to this linear understanding of education-to-work for economic development. I sought alternative lenses through which the opinions and choices of young people could be understood. It became apparent that even the most informed young people encountered obstacles to following 'efficient' transition patterns. It also became apparent that the transitions were situated within a social and cultural understanding of education, work and skills, and that these definitions were rooted in historical understandings that could not be easily uprooted. Gaining a clearer picture of the relationship between education aspirations and choices and the available opportunities required alternative theorising, and more in-depth probing and analysis.

In 2012 I was involved in designing and managing a 'traveling careers guidance exhibition' that was held in several girls' and boys' secondary schools for one week at a time in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The fair involved installing twenty 'career booths', each representing a different broad career and included posters with a 'pathway map' that resembled an underground transportation map, each stop represented a different job, ranging from entry level to more senior. These were presented as 'stops' along the pathway to the ultimate career. The careers were diverse and included architect, engineer, physician, and film producer. Students would take 30-50 minutes out

of their school day to browse the careers and discuss required education backgrounds, potential career routes, and challenges and opportunities with career representatives.

Throughout the exhibition tour, we were faced with several unexpected interruptions. The most significant was in the last girls' school we visited, when the head of the school abruptly cancelled the pupils' visits, despite the exhibit being an approved program from the Ministry of Education (MOE). We (a team of mostly young Saudi women from varying socioeconomic and education backgrounds) were reproached for designing a culturally and religiously offensive exhibition. To appease the head teacher and re-open the exhibition, we agreed to cover the 'film producer' booth with a black sheet. Her discomfort predominantly stemmed from one single word on a booth poster: one of the stops on the map was 'actor'. She expressed that our exhibition was 'misguiding' the students. The job of actor offended the head, and she believed it would offend the students, parents and other visitors to the school. The head refused to allow her students, respectable young Saudi women, to aspire to a career in acting. Furthermore, the suggestion that actor was on par with teacher or IT specialist on other booths was unacceptable in her mind.

This experience highlights some of the contradictory characteristics of education-to-work pathways in Saudi Arabia, which leads us to question individual young people's freedom to choose. Brought to the forefront is the sociological debate on social action, which questions whether the origin of human behaviour is a result of freely chosen actions, or whether it is controlled by the structures of the society. The presented options available to students appear to be heavily influenced by social and cultural attitudes. Contradictions within the goals of government policy and social norms raise additional questions about how policies succeed or fail to satisfy young people's needs. The MOE officials who approved the exhibition content were advocating for a broadening of young people's 'horizons' under the theme: 'discover your passion, create your future'. How these experiences go on to frame youth opinions is unclear. Existing literature about educational transition decisions shows that for young people, opportunities tend to be

contingent on a combination of factors such as ease of access, personal dispositions, and the influence of family members and trusted adults (Ball and Vincent, 1998). The reaction of the head teacher raises a variety of questions about the ability of young people to make choices, the social structures that frame their aspirations, and the role of gender, to name a few. It also highlights areas where transition literature that emphasises the role of individual agency in education choice (Beck, 1994; Becker, 1964; Bennett, 1992; Duckworth and Eskreis-Winkler, 2015; Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017) generated in a Western context may fall short of illuminating the experience of young Saudis.

1.2 School-to-work transitions in the contemporary global setting

This thesis is interested in choices of young people and career transitions in Saudi Arabia, paying particular attention to transitions into vocational education and training. Wider debates about youth transitions, vocational education and Saudi Arabia inform the lenses through which these concepts are conceptualised throughout the research. Within the field of sociology, research about young people in the 21st century examines the challenges and opportunities they face as they move toward adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Far from a purely psychological or developmental phase, the concept of youth is related to social conceptions of young people's roles and responsibilities. The characteristics of this life phase depend on the contextual circumstances of a young person.

Youth is defined in different ways that both incorporate varying characteristics as well as different age ranges. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) states that there are 1.2 billion young people around the world, defining youth as "persons aged between 15 and 24", but contends that the definition is flexible (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2019). Throughout the latter part of the twentieth Century, it is argued that the phase is now prolonged (Côté, 2002). Rather than the term youth, Arnett (2000) refers to this phase as *emerging adulthood*. He argues that within industrialised countries, changes in the twentieth century have altered the developmental phase between teens and

adulthood. This has led to an extended period which he claims is theoretically and empirically distinct from both adolescence and adulthood. However, the period of youth has been debated in the literature, and in addition to context, Bynner (2005) highlights the way capital accumulation over time and through encounters in work and partnerships can also be used to distinguish adulthood from childhood. Bynner (2005) is critical of “blanket categorization of individuals in terms of stages bounded by chronological age” (378). Honwana (2014) describes the phase between childhood and adulthood and as a ‘twilight zone’ and calls it ‘waithood’ (Honwana, 2014, p. 38). She argues that the extended period applies beyond the industrialised world, but in the context of Africa is related to lack of equity, and is beginning to replace adulthood.

The definition of youth has policy implications related to work and education. young people whose age no longer falls within the age range defined as eligible for educational and youth services, but who still have similar needs, miss out. In its first Youth Report, Saudi Arabia defined youth as the period between 15 and 32 (General Authority for Statistics Saudi Arabia (GaStat), 2019a). Throughout this thesis, I adopt the definition of youth presented by Furlong and Woodman (2015). This definition distinguishes the period from other life stages, where youth is “a socially defined phase in the life course that stands between childhood and adulthood. It is a period of semi-dependence which is constructed differently in various contexts” (p. 2). While the origins of studying young people’s educational transitions focused on finding careers that fit suitable individual identity characteristics in the 1970s, the focus shifted at the end of the 20th century when it was more widely acknowledged that young people were encountering complex challenges that were beyond an individual’s capacity to overcome (Furlong and Woodman, 2015). Since the latter part of the 20th Century an extended youth phase in industrialised countries has challenged a linear understanding of transitions from education to work, as more young people tend to engage in post-secondary education and delay marriage and moving out of the family home. With this shift, studies increasingly examine young people’s ability to explore opportunities and

make choices, while shedding light on the social constraints that they encounter (related to gender, ethnicity, class, etc.) (Arnett, 2000; Cote and Levine, 2014; Diepstraten, du Bois-Reymond and Vinken, 2006; Roberts, 2009). Education to work transitions are a site where young people often confront barriers to access, and their ability to participate is discussed in relation to social positioning (Fuller *et al.*, 2008; Snee and Devine, 2015). Additionally, policy-makers explore ways to remove barriers to access while developing mechanisms to enhance 'efficient' transitions for young people (Ball, 1998).

In the contemporary global economic system, young people are brought up to believe that education is essential for a successful transition into the labour market (Franceschelli, 2016). Just as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 policies prioritise strong linkages between education and the labour market, many national economies increasingly focus on aligning skills with economic needs across the industrialised and developing worlds, including an expansion of vocational education (Wyn, 2009). A global education industry informs national education policies and curriculum design, setting the standards for measuring success without sufficient regard for local needs (Ball, 2012; Wyn, 2009). The education process is thus an apparatus to produce skills that increase employability, 'vocationalising' the process of education as a functional practice (Bills, 2009; Pavlova, Lee and Maclean, 2017). The effects of vocationalism must be further explored to fully understand the implications for equitable educational routes and pathways as well as career destinations and opportunities.

Throughout this thesis, the position of Saudi youth will be considered, exploring the way in which the global policy shift toward education for skills influences the Saudi policies, and the resulting opportunities available to young people. It will consider the way the local context influences young people's ability to make choices along their education-to-work transition pathways. Existing literature related to young people's educational decisions in Saudi Arabia focuses on skills and employability. A deeper understanding of the historical cultural and educational context will be explored in Chapter Two, but is introduced briefly below.

1.3 Saudi Arabia: A contemporary overview

The relatively young country of Saudi Arabia, established in 1932, has a large and diverse population spread across an arid desert terrain in the Arabian Peninsula. As of 2018, the population of Saudi Arabia was officially reported at slightly over 32.5 million, 38% of whom are non-native (GaStat, 2016). Saudi Arabia's annual GDP is reported at \$645 billion (World Bank, 2017a), with a per capita GDP of \$20,750 (World Bank, 2017a)⁸. These statistics contrast with just fifty years ago in 1968 when the population was estimated to be between 4 million and 6 million (Al Fahad, 2015), the GDP was estimated at 4.1 billion, and the per capita GDP was \$777 (World Bank, 2017a). The country occupies 2,149,690 square kilometres of the Arabian Peninsula, which is about nine times larger than the United Kingdom (My Life Elsewhere, 2018). The climate is characterised as a harsh dry desert with extreme temperatures, with a mostly sandy desert terrain (CIA, 2015). As of 2017, 84% of the population lived in urban centres, in contrast to 45% in 1968 (World Bank, 2017a). The king of Saudi Arabia is the chief of state as well as head of government, and the monarchy is hereditary. The legal system is based on a Sunni interpretation of Islamic Sharia law with a legislative Consultative Council or the *Majlis al-Shura*⁹, a unicameral council with appointed members serving four-year terms (CIA, 2015).

Western research about Saudi Arabia tends to address many of the same issues: the oil economy, gender, and Islam (See Chapter Two). The stories, which have a tendency to highlight the social and economic in light of differences rather than similarities with the rest of the world, are framed by statistics about the rapid economic growth and the development of a country in the span of a few decades, and the resulting

⁸ For comparative purposes, the 2018 UK GDP per capita was \$39,720 (World Bank, 2017b).

⁹ The Consultative Council also known as the *Shura Council or Majlis al-shura* is a unicameral council with 150 seats; members appointed by the monarch to serve 4-year terms (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2015).

political influence Saudi Arabia has around the world. Saudi social experiences are often framed in binary terms where people are assumed to have gross privilege or be subjected to gross disadvantages. Furthermore, locally generated research tends to produce statistical data to support policy development, often with an economic focus that glosses over the diverse views and social characteristics of participants. Unfortunately, that means that policies will inevitably deepen existing inequalities unless they are brought to the surface and better understood.

1.4 Research questions

This thesis proposes to examine youth aspirations related to TVET opportunities in order to gain a clearer understanding of employment and education responses in the face of the economic shifts and labour demands in Saudi Arabia. Despite being the targeted recipient of TVET, the voices of young people have been absent from related policies and previous research. The identification of decision-making influencers, e.g., gender, parents, social networks, etc., and the variations in individual experiences will help paint a clearer picture of facilitators and barriers to choosing TVET and related employment opportunities. Despite many efforts, there are obstacles to engaging young people in the labour market at expected levels and across sectors and industries. As mentioned in the overview of employment patterns earlier in this chapter (Section 1.1.1.1), few Saudis hold TVET certifications. I have thus identified my research problem: As Saudi Arabia continues to invest in and expand TVET as a means to increase economic performance, diversity and autonomy, young people's participation levels in these training programs has not met the government's expectations.

A review of education and employment policies and literature within the context of Saudi Arabia has led to two overarching research questions that this thesis sets out to answer:

1. How do young people's perceptions of career opportunities influence their career aspirations and choices in relation to TVET?

2. How do structural institutions influence young people's decisions related to TVET?

To answer these questions, I conducted 18 focus groups and 16 individual interviews with 152 students in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. These young men and women were enrolled in secondary or initial TVET (See Chapter Four for a detailed overview of the sample). The analysis of the individual and group interviews through a constructivist lens has allowed me to present the perceptions of young people through their own voices, providing insight into the way structural institutions influence their decisions and influence their opportunities and choices. The portrait of young people that is painted ultimately shows that despite the changes in the country, when it comes to choices, young people are colouring within the lines.

I argue that as youth navigate through education pathways, they may be restricted by their backgrounds and social positions or propelled by their agency and resilience. Without bringing to the fore the different faces of structure and agency within the Saudi context, we overlook the young people's lived experiences. Furthermore, developing economies tend to borrow policies and strategies from other parts of the world, importing packaged solutions that neglect to uncover the way social norms and educational systems create unique local challenges within different state systems.

Throughout this thesis, I emphasize the importance of understanding the context within which choices are made. The social and cultural characteristics of Saudi Arabia play a significant role in the way youth perceive and accept choices within the state-led education system. Availability of opportunities does not automatically translate into access, as individual social characteristics such as gender and socioeconomic status can enhance or depress both opportunity as well as perception of opportunity. The political system within Saudi Arabia is centralised and authoritarian, and reforms are state-led and managed. However, the patterns of young people's career choices highlight ways where embedded historical and cultural norms challenge powerful attempts to adopt new norms and more 'modern' employment patterns.

Whereas the majority of young Saudis were guaranteed government employment as the country's oil revenues funded its expansion and institutional development in the foundation stages of the country (1950s-1970s), contemporary financial and social developments in the global economy have changed the demands and opportunities of education and employment within Saudi Arabia. The way young people respond to these demands shed light on the complexities that arise when young people are confronted with opportunities that do not fit their traditional definitions of acceptable and desirable education and employment opportunities. Even with the economic shifts within the country, 38% of employed Saudis work in public administration positions in the government, which represents the highest concentration of Saudis in any other economic sector (See Appendix 3 for a breakdown of Saudi participation in the labour force by main economic activity).

1.5 Overview of chapters

This thesis will provide a contextual background of relevant historical, economic, social political and educational details about Saudi Arabia. The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Following this first introductory chapter, Chapters Two and Three provide a review of relevant literature. Chapter Two reviews and analyses literature related to the contextual setting of the study. It begins with a general overview of key features of Saudi Arabia, and then discusses the social and economic features of the country. Furthermore, Chapter Two provides an overview of the education system in Saudi Arabia and its key structural features, including the structure and development of TVET in Saudi Arabia. This chapter is necessary to better understand the context within which academic and employment decisions are situated.

From there, Chapter Three reviews literature related to youth transitions and provides a detailed overview of the chosen conceptual framework that informs the empirical data analysis. This chapter explores debates related to youth studies, the role of structure and agency in decision-making as well as literature related to technical and

vocational education, and the way in which young people experience TVET transitions globally. In this chapter I argue that although concepts of 'human capital' drive economic policies (Becker, 1964), this economic approach assumes that students are rationally responding to labour market supply and demand. While this may provide a partial explanation for young people's behaviour, a wider set of factors including social and cultural pressures have rarely been considered in the Saudi context. A deeper understanding of the Saudi career decision-making and TVET context could offer explanations for youth dispositions that deviate from the intended policy outcomes. The theory of Careership, as developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996), a middle-level sociological concept of career decision-making built on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) is discussed in depth, presenting the framework through which a deeper understanding of agency is expressed within structural settings. Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) engage with the nature of individual actions so that opportunities and choices are influenced by and re-enforce the broader social context. This approach forms the framework through which the identified research questions are answered.

The key concepts that have enabled me to identify my research design and data collection analysis approach will be presented and discussed in Chapter Four, wherein the methodological underpinnings of the research design are discussed, in addition to ethical and reflexive considerations. Chapter Four describes the interpretive qualitative research design, the research sample, and data collection methods.

Chapters Five and Six present the analysis of collected empirical data. In Chapter Five, I present data that sheds light on the narratives that emerge from discussing experiences of TVET transitions with the participants. Chapter Six goes on to examine how youth navigate through social structures, highlighting how the different levels of social capital influence experiences, aspirations and opinions. It highlights the way in which the participants negotiate opportunity and choice within different social structures.

Chapter Seven is the main discussion chapter, in which I explore the way the collected data and analysis offer empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions to existing structure-agency debates. In this chapter I re-visit the findings, discussing the broader implications of the analysis and some resulting policy suggestions. Finally, I revisit the body of theory that was consulted in shaping the interpretive conceptual framework, examining ways in which this was useful to my understanding young Saudis' navigation through transition pathways, and ways in which it allowed for a deeper understanding of aspirations and motivations of youth in Saudi Arabia. This chapter considers the way the empirical evidence challenges existing literature and also ways it contributes to our understanding of youth in different contexts and under different circumstances.

Finally, I will offer a brief conclusion in Chapter Eight which will further consider how shifts in education and economic policies in Saudi Arabia continue to shape aspirations. It highlights limitations of the research, and provides recommendations for further investigation and research.

Chapter 2. **Social, economic and political overview**

Of all the sources I consulted in the early days of conceptualizing my research questions, the most thought provoking was written by former Saudi Minister of Education Dr Ahmed Al Issa, whose books, written before his Ministerial term, are banned in Saudi Arabia (Al Issa, 2009). The book presented specific historical events such as television interviews and journalistic reactions against critics of 'the religious monopoly in education', for which he blamed the stagnant curriculum and poor performance standards. With the launch of Vision 2030, his critical views of the education system positioned him as a favoured candidate for Minister to challenge the status quo, but his books remain banned. Al Issa's dual role as a controversial critic of a system and its leader is a quintessential example of the struggle to balance the often contradicting and multifaceted demands of Saudi society. Despite the fast pace of economic changes for over fifty years between 1965 and 2016, it was not until the launch of Vision 2030 that aims to loosen the 'conservative religious stronghold' on society became explicit. The evolution of the way the Saudi government, society and economy reconciled the contradictions is essential to understanding the way education and TVET policy are formulated and perceived.

This study assumes that young people's decisions about education and work are contextually informed, therefore necessitating the discussion of social and economic aspects of the Saudi case. This discussion will enable contextual analysis of the empirical data which will be presented in Chapters Five and Six. The consulted policy documents, international statistical databases, international organisation research, and various historical and sociological studies of Saudi Arabia allow for a more detailed picture of the landscape within which education and career transitions take place. The chapter will be divided into three main sections; it will begin with a discussion of the development of governing structures in Section 2.1. Section 2.2 will discuss social features of Saudi Arabia, including the role of social networks and relationships, and Section 2.3 will give an overview of Saudi economic and labour policies as they relate to

education. Finally, Sections 2.5 and 2.6 will provide an overview of the education and TVET structures in Saudi Arabia, and some features that distinguish TVET development post Vision 2030.

2.1 The development of governing structures

The current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, established in 1932 is the third official Saudi state, as many attempts to unify the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula had been made by the Al Saud family since the 1700s. Before the discovery of oil in 1938¹⁰, the six-year-old Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consisted of a small tribal population called *Bedouins* with little to no formal education¹¹. The tribal population had a proud history of territorial conquests and the management of resources was their source of regional power and pride. As Islam was already prevalent throughout the Peninsula since its establishment in Mecca in the 7th Century, the religion played a significant role in the unification process of Saudi Arabia. Facilitated by a close relationship with Mohammed ibn Abdulwahhab's reformist Islamic movement¹², the Saudi government expanded their rule over the Arabian Peninsula, and as an extension of those efforts, in some parts of the country the markers of social class remain predominantly religious (Vassiliev, 2000). Furthermore, the incorporation of Mecca—the holiest site in the Islamic religion—into the state facilitated a standardisation of religious practice. The formation of a religious establishment with oversight and enforcement abilities continues to influence global Islamic practices in contemporary times. The authority of this religious establishment is observable in all social and institutional settings and has played an influential role in the organisation of education, public behaviour and employment opportunities.

¹⁰ Oil was first discovered in Dammam, the capital of the Eastern Province (OPEC, 2015).

¹¹ UNESCO estimates that in 1965 95% of the working age population was illiterate.

¹² Mohammed Ibn Abdulwahhab's ascribed to the Islamic 'Hanbali' school of thought, named after Imam Ibn Hanbal. Ibn Hanbal was one of four Sunni Imams that emerged during the Abbasid Caliphate (who preceded the Ottomans from 750-1517). Mohammed Ibn Abdulwahhab used a very strict interpretation of Ibn Hanbal's laws and Abdulwahhab's teachings referred to as *Wahhabi* Islam or *Wahhabism* today (Shukri, 1972).

Before the 1940s the Saudi government was administered through an informal system of social and cultural mechanisms specific to the Arabian Peninsula (Fakeeh, 2009; Shukri, 1972). Most state affairs were dealt with behind closed doors and with the support of a very small consultative Political Committee comprised mainly of foreign nationals from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya as well as the UK, and there was little to no representation of the different geographical areas of the Saudi state within this cabinet (Fakeeh, 2009). The dependence on foreign consultation in establishing ministries and government foreshadows the role of consultants and the reliance on external expertise in the contemporary Vision 2030 context.

This course of development with the support of foreign experts was not unique to Saudi Arabia, as similar approaches of transplanting developed existing bureaucratic systems into economies which were still in a feudal stage was common in much of the developing world, thus introducing a marketised economy, bureaucratic government institutes, salaried jobs, and schools all at the same time, rather than through a gradual and local development process (Oxenham and Oxenham, 1984). Fakeeh supports this argument, illustrating how Saudi Arabia's institutions skipped the stage of nation building that in democratic European states, "had developed over centuries of war, rebellion and organic growth" (Fakeeh, 2009, p. 8), and which would have allowed for a deeper appreciation of the state's needs, and the adoption of a system that represented the varied interests of the diverse population.

In the contemporary governing structures, power and decision-making is centralised within the Council of Ministers, headed by the Monarch, and several ministries which incorporate many of these elites in the deliberation processes. Official public participation is prevalent only in municipal and local elections (MCIT, 2018). Coupled with economic control over oil revenues (See Section 2.4), the limited civic engagement has significant implications for the distribution of rights and responsibilities within the country. Ultimate control remains with the King and those with whom the Al Saud family has created bonds and agreements defend this right to rule.

The influx of oil revenues in the 1950s allowed for the consolidation of the Saudi State and facilitated the establishment of governance institutions, replacing an ad-hoc management of funds and social organisation previously utilised by the Al Saud family. Before the governance institutions were formalised, the state often financially supported its small population through the distribution of direct handouts from members of the royal family. Some of these handouts were in the form of government subsidies as salaries, and in other cases people became part of royal entourages. Furthermore, the intermarriage between different tribal elites' female kin with the Al Saud family elevated certain tribal lineages, enhancing access to both direct handouts and to positions in government and business (Al Rasheed, 2000). In the contemporary social system, elite status is often a result of the extension of this elevated or depressed tribal status, especially in the absence of financial resources. Samin (2015) argues that from the point of view of tribal elite, the perpetuation of tribal relationships is a form of a rejection of modernity. This rejection romanticises the social order which pre-dated Saudi rule. Furthermore, tribal affirmation or denial tends to override religious teachings of equality and access. This is perpetuated in the contemporary Saudi state through persistent favouritism and social status. It plays a balancing role to appease all parties who would theoretically harbour ill sentiments due to the elimination of the past social order where they may have played a more predominant role. However, Samin (2015) also argues that tribal nostalgia romanticises a past that is predominantly symbolic, and despite references to past power, much of the Saudi population was heavily dependent on "state largesse" (Samin, 2015, p. 202). The tribal *Bedouin* population was also engaged in traditional forms of education related to their core economic activities.

In addition to the tribal families, the status of commercial families who had previously played a role in the country's development was also re-drawn. Commenting on the formation of the Saudi state after the discovery of oil, Al Rasheed (2000) notes, 'With oil, local merchant families lost all semblance of their previous bargaining power vis-à-vis the state'(p. 126). This bargaining power from an educated constituency could

have been put toward earning these merchant families the ability to influence the policies that were being created to govern the young kingdom, such as the education system, the distribution of wealth and land, and development priorities. Had this representation been allowed in the significant years of nation building (1964–1980), it may have become the norm in the following decades, allowing the country's educated class to make positive contributions to the country's early development (Fakeeh, 2009; Heradstveit and Hveem, 2004).

The short history of the formation of government institutions, including education and economic organisations has led to a duality within the Kingdom. Although the late 1940s witnessed rapid economic growth due to oil exports, institutional growth did not thrive in the same way. The government was quite suddenly equipped with the funds to grow at a rapid rate, but with very few educated nationals, it was faced with major obstacles. As the state continued to expand throughout the 1970s and 1980s a skilled elite began to occupy newly established government entities to facilitate growth and development. These institutes are described by Hertog (2010) as islands of efficiency, as those entities were given relative autonomy from the rest of the civil service. This allowed some social mobility to aspiring technocrats, and up until the 1980s the 'islands' served as a mechanism to circumvent large bureaucratic obstacles. It also meant that policymaking tended to happen in a siloed manner.

2.2 Family, relationships and social networks

The nucleus of identity and social relationships in Saudi Arabia is the family unit (Yamani, 2000). Family and community are emphasised in descriptions of Saudi society, and as we will see in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, family values are one of the main factors influencing youth decisions, including decisions related to their careers. Kattan (2017) notes how the family represents the building block of society, which creates a hierarchical social order with older members holding seniority over younger ones. He argues that the family represents a 'pre-political' domain within Saudi Arabia that allows for state

access to the inner workings of family relations, wherein the family serves as a functional medium for the state's influence.

A broad lineal and kinship web, in combination with state-endorsed religious values, underlie the structure of the individual family. The amount of *social* and *cultural capital* a family has, two concepts that will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three, is related to their wider social relationships, and each individual within the family is responsible for maintaining the status of the family structure:

Undergirding the patriarchal family were cultural and religious values that permeated the society as a whole, and that found their clearest expression in tribal values and practices. Families shared a sense of corporate identity, and the esteem of the family was measured by the individual's capacity to live up to socially prescribed ideals of honour (Metz, 1993, p. 67).

This value system translates into preference for certain jobs over others, depending on historical features; nomadic, settled, agricultural, merchant or religious. Vassiliev (2000) provides a historical overview of the geographic distribution and its relationship to the enduring values of people from different social origins, and notes for instance that those from traditionally merchant-based economic areas of the country (coastal cities of the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf) tend to go into industry or commerce. Furthermore, families with heavy ties to nomadic tribes value flexibility and independence; families with agricultural backgrounds tend to continue work in those vocational fields or pursue more entrepreneurial ventures, and families with weaker social ties, i.e. those who immigrated later to the Arabian Peninsula from the Levant or Africa or are from a religious minority (predominantly Shias) often had less control over their choices and tended to occupy more labour-intensive jobs. For instance, the Sunnis formed a minority in Al Ahsa region, but they occupied positions of rulers, merchants and landlords. The majority of Al Ahsa residents, including pearl-divers, craftsmen and peasants, were from the Shia sect, which was given lesser status (Vassiliev, 2000).

Although challenged by modernity at times, a person's status continues to be influenced by region of origin, traditional mode of life, intermarriage with other families, tribal and religious affiliations and to a lesser (but growing) extent, education and employment. Saudi historians argue that the adoption of a modern economy and the process of state building led to the creation of a class-based system that replaced the traditional tribal-feudal one, but stress that tribal relationships and kinship remain significant and overarching (Al Rasheed, 2000; Samin, 2015; Vassiliev, 2000). For instance, as marriages are still largely facilitated by family members, families of women from 'pure' tribes would often choose suitors for their daughters who are from prestigious tribal backgrounds and reject highly educated or very wealthy suitors who have weaker 'tribal lineage' (Vassiliev, 2000).

Similar to arguments of Samin (2015), Al Fahad (2015) argues that the consolidation of the state along with economic growth, oil revenues and modernisation led to new status groups and gaps among close kin. The transformations led to new sources of prestige, and statuses became frozen in time, since tribes could no longer reclaim 'pure' status through military prowess as was the case in the past. He argues that the social environment does not esteem a foreign or nontribal pedigree, leading many non-pure tribes to try to fabricate their lineage, and that this obsession with social origin and the accompanying power characterises much of the underlying motivation young people have to acquire social status and ranking. While the battlefield is no longer an arena for gaining power, Saudis make choices motivated by a desire to achieve status that was unlikely to be attainable in the past. This power-seeking behaviour manifests in the ways young people make choices related to education-to-work transitions, and will be explored further throughout the thesis.

During the State's previous reigns, and persisting into the modern establishment of the Saudi State, the Al Sauds affiliated with Wahhabi religious leaders (See Section 2.1), and formed alliances with influential tribes and merchants across the country, shifting allegiance to themselves by extension, and limiting those parties' bargaining

power (Al Rasheed, 2000, p. 126; Fakeeh, 2009). These alliances continue to influence decisions related to employment, marriage prospects and nepotism (Samin, 2012).

The settlement of tribes and the allegiances that were formed in the early days of statehood plays a significant role in defining 'class' and social standing, as well as the level of power and political access and individual identity (Weiner, 2016). While many tribes were traditionally nomadic and not tied to specific geographic locations within the Arab World, their locations at the time of the unification of the current state contributed to a degree of permanence.

Tribal allegiances also became permanent, thus giving tribes that were part of the unifying efforts of Al Saud prominence over those who may have been adversaries. The division between nomadic and settled inhabitants also influences values and identity, and attitude toward work. The genealogical traditions and tribal formations fluctuated and varied over time but persisting claims to membership in tribes with a 'pure' and traceable lineage, amongst both nomadic and settled communities, continues to dominate social ranking and status (Al Fahad, 2015). Settled communities maintained their tribal identities, but were traditionally engaged in agriculture, commerce and trade. *Bedouin* nomadic communities, on the other hand, were constantly in search of more territory to control, as 'purity' was not necessarily a traceable lineage as much as it was a reflection of power gained from winning feuds over desert territory and natural resources, creating a 'caste' system that continues to contribute to social status, as Al Fahad (2015) notes:

Once a tribe is militarily defeated and agrees to pay tribute to a more powerful tribe, the notion emerges that this vanquished tribe is paying tribute not because of contingent power relations but because of an eternal defect in its status—that it was created to become a vassal (p. 272).

Groups of tribes who were categorised as genealogically less pure were given a low social ranking and often served as 'craftsmen, hunters, and guides in the desert' (Al Fahad, 2015, p. 272).

Social origin is often easily identified by the family name, and maintaining social networks with traditional tribal affiliates ensures access to a communal social capital (Samin, 2015), often redeemed and offered in the form of mediation and support, known regionally as *wasta* (See 2.3). As members of families whose genealogy was less 'pure' began to occupy high-ranking positions in business and government due to increased education, a resurgence and documentation of genealogies ensured that the once primarily oral histories of nobility continued to dictate a social hierarchy. This led many to assert their past lineage in order to claim their historical entitlements which underscore the communal benefits, often limiting social mobility and access to opportunities for some, and facilitating it for others (Samin, 2015). While there may be a romanticising of past roles and work, it was often not the elite Saudis that were working in the early days of state establishment, as they principally relied on the expertise of others to do the work for them:

Trade relied on experienced personnel, well-established traditions and solid links with trading partners. Some trading companies from Hijaz and al-Hasa¹³ were run by naturalized Syrians, Palestinians and [other] Arabs (Vassiliev, 2000, p. Loc11580).

As the Saudi state grew employment opportunities in government translated into stable income and benefits, weakening those traditional employment value systems. Government employment opportunities became the most sought-after positions, albeit with remnants of historical tribal values. Ensuring employment opportunities for family and kinship members was one major manifestation of such remnants. Even at the peak of the Saudi state's bureaucratisation phase in the 1950s and 1960s, Vassiliev (2013) argues that family connections and social status were more important than efficiency and competence in all areas including employment. Those who occupied positions that were

¹³ AlHijaz refers to the Western Province and Al Ahsa refers to the Eastern Province.

considered more prestigious and enjoyed more leisure time extended their distinctive position to members of their social networks. These cultural attributes defined ideas of access to employment and expectations in the workplace. In addition to the authority held by business owners and government management positions, seniority was also personified in a paternalistic manner, where strictness was admired but so too was care and sympathy for their subordinates' adversity. Existing kinship ties provide necessary connections and the necessary 'wasta' (see Section 2.3) to help access available opportunities.

2.3 The *wasta*: access through social connections

The longstanding kinship ties and tribal allegiances form the foundation of a system of reciprocal support and favours known as *wastas*. The literal translation of *wasta* is a 'mediator' or 'middleman', and refers to the use of connections to obtain a goal (Egan and Tabar, 2016). Abalkhail and Allan (2016) define a *wasta* as 'a social network of interpersonal connections, rooted in family and kinship ties, and linked to family affairs' likening the *wasta* to 'an old boys network' (p. 174). Access to *wasta* enhances power, social status and sometimes financial wealth, but is not contingent on these, nor does using a *wasta* guarantee that the recipient of the favour will obtain any of this. Hertog (2010) argues that the *wastas* were utilised as a way to access administrative channels and state wealth that would otherwise be unavailable through conventional mechanisms in an authoritarian rentier¹⁴ state.

Hutchings and Weir (2006) compare a *wasta* to the Chinese notion of *guanxi*, but also highlight that *wastas* have not been adequately researched in the same way. They

¹⁴ Saudi Arabia is often described as a 'rentier' state, meaning it is resource-rich, and that resources are controlled by a minority, leading to negative impacts on democracy and quality of institutions. The distance between the controlling elite and citizens is mediated through 'brokers' who seek to bridge patron-client relationships (Hertog, 2010). Hertog notes that brokerage is different from the concept of 'rent seeking', which involves one actor taking resources from another institution or individual for him/herself. With brokerage, there are no direct material rewards, and multiple people are involved.

study the concept of a *wasta* comparatively because Arabs share apparent cultural characteristics with the Chinese, particularly in regard to 'group-based' collectivism and the importance of reputation (Hofstede, 2001; Hutchings and Weir, 2006). *Guanxi* is defined as a 'relationship between two people expected, more or less, to give as they get' (Hutchings and Weir, 2006, p. 143). Similarly, a *wasta* can help with anything from cancelling a parking ticket to obtaining a stake in a large investment bid, if you can offer support in return or may be able to in the future. Often, a *wasta* is someone who has power, or proximity to power and can put in a good word for you without breaking any laws or rules. In both China and the Arab World, having a *wasta* is important because selection and recruitment (in work and education) is often subjective and depends on 'personal contacts, nepotism, regionalism and family name' (Hutchings and Weir, 2006, p. 151). According to Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993), *wasta* is broader than corruption, because some *wasta* acts are legal and moral, depending on the cultural context. The long-standing relationships and web of social ties discussed in 2.2 allows individuals to access those in power by drawing on relatives, distant cousins, tribal affiliates and colleagues who may be able to access decision-makers in business and government more directly. Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993) explains a *wasta* as

The ability to manoeuvre the conflict into a desirable arena, thereby activating some potential stakeholders and minimizing the influence of others, [which] often gives one control of the outcome (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993, p. 138).

Egan and Tabar (2016) argue that people's dispositions to utilising *wastas* is dependent on their social status and the social space that they inhabit as well as the resources they can access. *Wastas* can have adverse effects for a variety of reasons: those who have a stronger *wasta* tend to benefit more than others, perpetuating existing inequalities and widening the gap between those in power and those who struggle to achieve. Additionally, *wastas* are often used at the family level, and when a father calls in a favour from a *wasta*, the children then bear the pressure to perform and maintain

the positive relationship with the person in power. *Wastas* can also lead to increased dependency on a more macro level, since a belief in a *wasta* means that people do not always need to put in the effort to achieve goals by their own merit. However, as a reciprocal system, this also means that there is pressure from both sides to strive for a positive outcome.

The relationship of *wastas* and social status is further complicated by different social roles, and is apparent when examining the experience of women. Abalkhail and Allan (2016) stress the disadvantages women face in professional and social networks due to the gendered and male dominated features of workplaces, and the way these manifests in women's social networks being tied to men's. They further stress the role of family, which they argue is essential for women's advancement in education and careers:

Male family members and their connections play a major role in supporting women through the education system and then helping them to achieve success in their promotion within organisations.”

(Abalkhail and Allan, 2016, p. 166)

In considering the enduring loyalties from a time when the population of Saudi Arabia was much smaller only 50 years ago, it is not difficult to imagine that almost 'everyone knows someone' that is now in a position to be their *wasta*. It is also important to note, however, that those who do not know the right person may easily fall out of the safety net that is perpetuated by the informal *wasta* system of opportunities.

2.4 Islam, globalisation, education and society

Islamic doctrine is taught as a way of life rather than simply a religion, presented through the sacred text of the Quran with a wide array of interpretations and religious manifestations that span diverse historical and geographical contexts (Lowi, 2017). It is argued that the Arabic language is inseparable from the daily rituals of the Islamic religion (Ismail, 2014), amplifying the role of religion in the everyday lives of Saudi citizens who speak Arabic across the country.

Within Saudi Arabia, Islam permeates all factions of society, from an individual's daily five prayers to the way the state manages and distributes public funds and judicial courts (Lowi, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, Islamic values are interwoven with tribal ones, and to a large extent, the two can be un-discernible. Islam has played a foundational role in the establishment of the first Saudi state extending into the current one, but it has been the source of contention as well as stability. Yamani (2000) stresses the role of religious culture in establishing a shared national identity¹⁵. The Islamic narrative pre-dated the current Saudi state, but the state was successful in capitalising on this narrative and embedding it into society in the form of "shared meanings that tied people to a particular configuration" (Al Rasheed, 2009, p. 256). This in turn allowed for a consolidation of the interpretation of appropriate religious behaviour, and an amalgamation of religion, culture and politics experienced by the average citizen, who "struggle to dismantle the three pillars of authoritarian rule, the historical, theological and political narratives propagated by the ruling elite" (Al Rasheed, 2009).

Religious conservatism is prevalent in all the Gulf states, as it remains a source of legitimacy to the monarchies (Ouaissa, 2018). Lowi (2017) notes the benevolence of the Saudi state, dressed in Islamic values through its utilisation of public funds for many social ends such as charity, subsidizing private sector employment, paying for education and healthcare, for instance, provides them additional political capital and legitimacy, yet at the same time open the government's actions up to be questioned from a religious point of view. Autocratic governance promotes the state's private interests over ethical codes of conduct. The state-sanctioned interpretation of Islam has left Saudi Arabia exposed to internal extremist terrorism against the state. Many believe that the Saudi curriculum and their management of the influence of religious clerics are to blame, and

¹⁵ Thompson (2019) critically engages with the notion of a national identity, highlighting the failure of the state to acknowledge multiple identities that existed before the consolidation of tribes under the rule of the Al Saud family.

are the creators of their own opponents (Al Rasheed, 2009). Even so, Saudi Arabia remains one of the most stable political entities within the Arab region despite its large and diverse population. Ouaisa (2018) presents findings from a study on young people and uncertainty in the Arab World, including Saudi's regional neighbour Bahrain, that showed that religion plays an important role in young people's lives. Young people's religiousness increased with increased socio-economic resources, and Islam provided a source of optimism for them. While Saudi youth were not included in the study, Saudi Arabia's economy sets it apart from other Islamic societies in its high-income status and continued welfare politics, making it a more fertile environment for religion to influence optimism and wealth to influence religiosity. The study also concluded that the majority of young people reported a desire for a political system that combined democratic and Islamic elements, but also "a desire for a strong man who governs the country" (Ouaisa, 2018) .

Although family and social relationships continue to form a foundation for social interactions, Saudi Arabia's young people are influenced by a global culture through media, international travel and relationships with the 40% of expatriates that live in the country. In his review of a post-secondary civic education textbook taught in higher education institutes in Saudi Arabia, Kattan (2017) notes the emphasis on the preservation of Islamic values for social stability and prosperity. The textbook warns of the destabilising currents of 'rapid change' and 'globalisation', both of which threaten the 'homogeneity of the population' and the nature and characteristics of citizens and undermine morals (Kattan, 2017, p. Loc 3829).

Others have noted a difficulty in aligning traditional and cultural expectations of the populations of Arab Gulf countries with the necessary challenges of a knowledge economy (Wiseman, Alromi and Alshumrani, 2014). According to Wiseman et al. (2014), local factors such as social and community organisation and 'conceptualised ideologies' influence educational policies and curriculum. They note that the relationship between cultural Islamic communities, especially those with a large skilled foreign labour

population, and the predominantly Western notion of a knowledge economy is surprising due to potential compromised values that could result from implementing technology and technical skills for boys and girls at a young age. To highlight how this transpires, Thompson (2019) notes how many young Saudis reject what they believe to be “Western soft power imperialism”, and are further perplexed by the replacement of English as a medium of education and work in the region (Thompson, 2019, p. 9). He also notes, however, that young Saudis understand the increasing interdependence of the world and the importance of engaging in global issues that directly and indirectly impact on their society.

In contrast to the notion of a clash of values, Saudis are digitally adept and engaged in social media, where 90% of the population actively uses the internet, and 75% are active on social media (gmi_blogger, 2018).

Globalisation has also influenced Saudi Arabia’s education sector through the introduction of education reforms and policy borrowing and the marketization of education policies (Donn and Al Manthri, 2010), creating social and economic problems for the region’s educational development and cultural identity. Donn and Al Manthri (2010) highlight the role of consultants in the region who promote educational policies and materials that were successfully implemented in other parts of the world such as Singapore or New Zealand, without sufficiently altering or tailoring them to local needs.

2.5 The economy and the labour market

The rapid growth enabled by the oil economy led to several challenges that are being addressed through economic, labour and financial planning and the recent Vision 2030. The economic dominance of the public sector and the economic dependence on a single natural resource for the majority of the history of the country plays a determining role in the availability of occupations and employment opportunities, and thus is a notably significant factor that influences perceptions of education and employment opportunities.

Oil export revenues account for anywhere between 80% and 90% of total government revenues and government expenditure is a major component of GDP averaging 35% (Al Qudair, 2005; Al Shahrani and Al Sadiq, 2014). Moreover, government expenditure is seen as the engine of economic growth and considered the leading sector in the economy; the majority of this spending is on government salaries (Al Qudair, 2005).

Economic activity is concentrated in two major semi-governmental companies, and their subsidiaries, that dominate the oil and petrochemical industries: Aramco and SABIC, which are referred to frequently throughout the empirical data. These companies on average pay high salaries relative to much of the private sector, have clear job progression and training opportunities, and have traditionally provided employees with housing and healthcare benefits, as well as pension schemes well before other companies had. The names of the companies tend to give status, regardless of job title, and the companies rarely terminate their employees.

According to a 2007 McKinsey & Company study "GCC Education Overview: Current Performance and Future Priorities", 41% of Saudi Arabia's population was under the age of 15, and unemployment levels for those under 30 years old was estimated at 30%--and 80% of these have never held a job before. Nearly 42% of the Saudi labour force is made up of Saudi nationals. The remaining 57% is made up of foreign nationals from different countries such as Egypt, Yemen, South Asia, India, etc. (Fayad *et al.*, 2012). Outside of Aramco and Sabic, the Saudi private sector employment remains low: despite a steady increase in total employment from 2005-2012, the majority of employees across sectors are non-Saudi nationals, representing 57% of employed persons (CDSI, 2015, p. 24). The 2016 unemployment rate hovered at around 12%, and large numbers of less educated Saudis continue to remain out of the labour force (Fleischhaker *et al.*, 2013).

As mentioned in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, people traditionally relied on the support of ruling tribes and their affiliates throughout the history of the Arabian Peninsula, and

after the consolidation of the Saudi state, this meant a reliance on the Al Saud family. While it is now under an economic guise, this reliance continues through Saudi Arabia's fiscal policy. Fiscal policy is considered a key element of Saudi Arabia's macroeconomic policy given the importance of public expenditures in financing investment and consumption activities, and their role in meeting the growing need for public social services. Total government expenditures increased from USD 1.6 billion in 1970 to USD 158.9 billion in 2010 (a 1,700% increase in real terms) in order to meet continuing increase in demand due to population growth and higher standards of living (Al Shahrani and Al Sadiq, 2014). According to a 2013 International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, although Saudi Arabia's economy is the largest in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region, the jobs that go to foreign workers result in higher unemployment among the rapidly growing Saudi labour force. For youth and women especially, unemployment rates remain high (Fleischhaker *et al.*, 2013). Fleischhaker *et al* list several unique characteristics of the labour force:

- Rapid economic growth due to large publicly funded infrastructure projects which did not contribute to increased Saudi employment.
- Public sector employment has more generous compensation packages for Saudis.
- Cultural factors depress female labour force participation.
- Skills and preferences gap between foreign and Saudi workers.

The historical social context and unemployment statistics suggest that the inorganic shift from traditional work, i.e. participation in elite tribal entourages, family commerce, agriculture, craftsmanship and religious teaching led to an apparent resistance to the new opportunities for work and education by many, especially those outside urban centres where the benefits of economic development was more visible. However, to mitigate the resistance to employment, rather than examine social values and consider traditional markers of class and prestige that underpin the motivation to participate in the formal economy, policy documents instead focus on a more functional approach of

economic incentives. However, considering the power of the *wastas* and the social safety net, economic incentives were not as strong a motivation as gaining status through prestigious positions and proximity to government. Low skilled jobs that offered growth opportunities were essentially provided as a government subsidy, and Saudi citizens were therefore characterised as aspiring to less physically challenging work.

This reputation and the resulting perpetuation of economic incentives has deep seated roots, as early development plans and surveys noted the attitudes and mindset toward labour-intensive work as an obstacle to development. One International Labour Organisation (ILO) report on “Labour Legislation and Labour Administration” prepared in response to the government’s request for technical assistance in establishing a labour policy in 1962 illustrates the embedded negative attitudes narrative about Saudis’ mindsets about employment. The author noted that:

It has been stated that the Saudi workers dislike heavier type of work and this view received some confirmation from the fact that no Saudi workers are employed at the Jeddah port where Yemenis and Nigerians wholly man the establishment. The port manager stated that Saudi workers preferred light work. This may be a phase through which other developing countries have been through and it may be assumed that Saudis will also get over it (Aslam, 1962, p. 16).

While this view was provided from a foreign consultant, the report did not comment on the reason for a preference for ‘light work’, nor did it factor in any plans to overcome this, other than offer a speculative and passive outcome of ‘getting over it’, which contemporary labour market statistics mentioned earlier show did not happen. While attitude may have been an issue, the source of this attitude was not addressed and remains speculative.

As the country began to grow demographically and economically throughout the early decades of its establishment, educational development became a key focus in the country in an effort to begin equipping a trained workforce. However, the rate of illiteracy in the late 1940s was very high and few young people had finished primary school

(Shukri, 1972). The new governing structures shifted traditional patterns of social, economic and cultural life significantly. Under close examination, it seems that the new institutions were perceived as intrusive and at conflict with the indigenous culture.

As the government pushed forward to modernise and develop economically with newfound resources, there was a struggle to find qualified Saudis to lead in the early days. High illiteracy rates and skills shortages prevailed. This shortage led to the recruitment of foreign labour across all sectors, while enacting plans to train and educate locals in the meantime (MEP, 1970). 'Human resources development'¹⁶ became and remains an essential economic development priority, underpinning all planning with a 'human capital' approach (See 3.1.1). In an effort to manage economic and social needs across sectors and industries the Ministry of Economy (MEP) released a series of five-year economic plans beginning in 1970, highlighting 'human resources development' as an essential development priority. There was an increase in spending over the years 1970-2014 on human resources and although the spending fluctuated it has remained above 50% of total government expenditure since 1995. (MOF, 2014). These investments exceeded infrastructure, economic resources, and social and health services and are referred to as 'the main pillar of human development' within the policy documents (MEP, 2013).

The development plans were driven by the need for a qualified, trained and educated national workforce, as was repeatedly cited as the rationale for increased investment and expansion. Reference to this rationale is made throughout the documents from the earliest ones, noting that, 'A potential major constraint to the country's development is the limit on its manpower in terms of both numbers and skills, in both the government and private sector' (MEP, 1975, p. 93). Later plans focused more

¹⁶ Defined as general and higher education, science and technology, and technical and vocational training (MEP, 1970).

on sector diversification and the importance of the role of education in helping the country compete globally: "The strategic basis is to increase the share of Saudi manpower in total employment in various sectors, pay attention to upgrading their efficiency and productivity through training and re-training, and continue to substitute Saudi manpower for non-Saudis" (MEP, 2005, p. 686). However, rather than achieve the expected achievement of replacing foreign workers with Saudis by 1990, the number of foreigners increased by the largest share during that period (MEP, 1990; MEP, 1995).

As the economic growth slowed in the 1990s, new Saudi entrants to the labour force continued to find employment predominantly in government rather than in the private sector. Between 1990-95 the tone of planning documents shifted, and the term 'Saudisation' was used more often to describe the process of replacing foreign workers with Saudis. The government was striving to shift the responsibility from public institutions and involve the private sector in the education, training and labour arena. The urgency of the tone increased, and the plans began to shift the responsibility of employment away from the government and place the burden on the individuals themselves.

The large government investments in infrastructure and basic industries have laid the physical foundations of a modern economy. It is during contemporary times, however, after 25 years of successful development planning, that human and institutional factors along with their related aspects of technology transfer and productivity take centre stage.

The above-mentioned approach and sudden shift of responsibility meant that the private sector companies, as well as individual actors, were now responsible for achieving the policy goals, albeit within a rigid structure that the 'government investments' had laid down as a foundation. Resolution No. 50 of the Council of Ministers dated 27 September 1994 ("Resolution No. 50") and several Ministry of Labour (MOL) circulars that followed can be seen as the beginning of the "labour force nationalisation" or "Saudisation" period, where the labour law was changed to explicitly stipulate an

increase in Saudi employment. After this resolution the Labour Law provided that Saudi nationals must comprise at least 75% of an employer's workforce, although the Minister of Labour has the authority to reduce this percentage where sufficient qualified Saudi nationals are not available. Efforts to curb the increasing imbalance of Saudi to foreign workers have included an ever shifting number of labour market policies, such as a fine-based, colour coded quota for companies, a de-facto minimum wage, unemployment benefits and most relevant to this study, an expansion in vocational education and training (Behar and Junghwan, 2013; MOL, 2013). It is argued that with this expansion of Saudisation, a narrative of a reciprocal relationship between a knowledge based economy and Saudisation was developed (Kattan, 2017).

Additionally, the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) was established in response to Royal Decree number 18M in August of 2000 after a recommendation to do so was made by the Council of Ministers. The HRDF was to serve as a semi-governmental entity responding to the ongoing struggle to prepare Saudi youth to "support the efforts to prepare a national workforce and help them be employed in the private sector." (HRDF, 2011, p. 2). The need for these shifts and the increased participation of the private sector stems from both the growing Saudi population and the economic strain on the state. To increase economic participation outside of government, the National Program to Assist Job Seekers, known as *Hafiz*, was launched in 2011. *Hafiz* provided data about private sector employment on a large national scale for the first time. The data revealed that the demand for public sector employment remained high (HRDF, 2011). In 2011, 40% of unemployment applicants held a secondary qualification and 17% of them held a Bachelor's Degree, but only 4% held a vocational or technical diploma. The highest percentage of diploma holders (24%) worked in clerical jobs rather than technical ones (CDSI, 2015, p. 61). The *Hafiz* database provided insight into job seeker aspirations, and the top five, all of which are predominantly available in the public sector were:

1. Education

2. Government and civil service
3. Health and health services
4. Financial services
5. Security

In 2015, most Saudis were employed in public administration and defence (35.2%), followed by the education sector (24.2%). Young men dominated the public administration and defence sector, as 41.2% of employed Saudi men worked in this field, followed by 15.3% of Saudi men who were employed in education. 70% of employed Saudi women worked in education, followed by the health and social services sector where 13.9% of employed Saudi women worked. On average, Saudis worked for 45.5 hours per week, however, the sector with the lowest weekly work hours was the education sector where the average is 35.4 hours per week (CDSI, 2015, p. 21). Non-Saudi workers were concentrated in the activity of retail and wholesale trade at 22% and construction activity at 21%. The shift in the data reporting structure in 2018 made a direct comparison difficult, as there was a re-definition of industries, but the private sector distribution showed that the majority of Saudis worked in 'other collective and social services (47%) and trade (19.8%) (See Appendix 3). Foreign workers continued to dominate the construction sector, comprising 87.8% of the sector. See Figure 2-1 (GaStat, 2019b).

Employment patterns continue to pose challenges to implementing economic and labour plans. While the government initially focused on growth, it depended on foreign labour as what was intended to be a temporary measure. Throughout this phase, however, Saudi nationals became accustomed to the availability of well-paying public sector jobs, and a foreign workforce that provided expertise as well as manual labour. The investment in the education of Saudi nationals was undertaken with the expectation that they would in turn drive economic growth. However, the statistics above show that the employment of foreign nationals and the welfare policies that accompanied rapid expansion set the expectations for nationals, who despite the increase in their education and skills levels, were not prepared to work in a more volatile, competitive and

demanding private sector. On average, the public sector pays men 65% higher average monthly salaries than the private sector. Women are paid 50% higher salaries in the public sector than the private sector. The wage gap is 32% between men and women in the private sector, and 9% in the public sector (GaStat, 2019b).

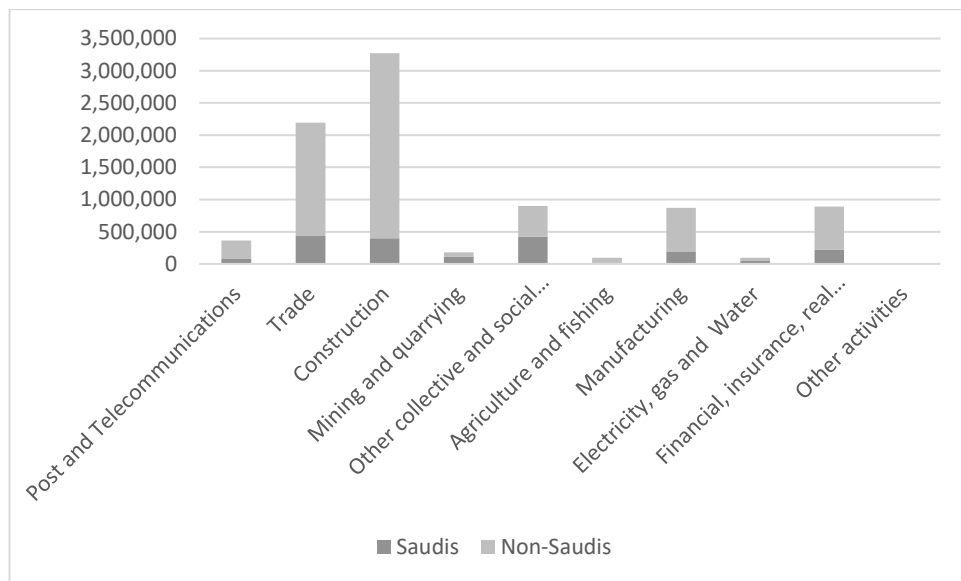


Figure 2-1 Distribution of private sector labour force by industry

Saudi Arabia's welfare model left citizens with little incentive to work, and many adopted a dependency mentality. The state provided services for free and employment tended to be readily available to the small population in the early years of economic growth. In a culture where the proximity to decision making and power is as prestigious as being in power, cultural values and historical developments must be more closely examined to better understand decisions and employment choices. The low participation rates of Saudis in the economy that became more measurable after the launch of programs such as *Hafiz* led to a series of efforts to bolster Saudisation. The retail, wholesale as well as hotels and restaurants sectors were identified as adequate targets for Saudization (MEP, 2015, p. 47). According to Kattan (2017), the narratives surrounding Saudisation only exacerbates a sense that employers are responsible for

providing secure, well paid work, weakening the drive individuals have to enhance their own skills. 'Saudisation is contributing to a social contract that promotes a sense of national entitlement and rewards unemployment' creating a fundamental disconnect between the goals of education and those of the labour market.

To further complicate understandings of labour market behaviours and potential mechanisms to shift these, the link between education and employment is weak and unregulated. The relationship between qualifications and employment can be described as dominated by an 'organisational space' (Müller and Shavit, 1998) where the majority of skills for work are developed on the job rather than in a classroom. As Baqadir, Patrick and Burns (2011) note, young prospective Saudi employees lack sufficient 'labour market literacy' and need both requisite skills to enhance employment chances as well as clearer pathways to link education to work (Baqadir, Patrick and Burns, 2011). Because of the weak links between education and work, those who complete their education in the Saudi education system are often unexposed to any form of practical work and have little knowledge of the demands and work expectations. The Saudi economic literature discussed in this section suggests a mismatch between the expectations of employers and Saudi job seekers. The next section will explore the education system in more depth to better highlight the mechanisms through which education is delivered within Saudi Arabia.

2.6 Foundations of the Saudi education system

The education system in Saudi Arabia is best understood as characterised by the context within which it was established. As discussed, upon establishing the country in 1932 and throughout its first two decades the Saudi government worked toward greater economic growth, while utilising its power to unify society in a way that would work in favour of the sustainability of its rule through strengthening regional allegiances with other tribal powers and religious figures.

At the time of the country's establishment, a very traditional and religiously oriented form of education prepared those who engaged in formal education to be theologians and religious scholars, however Saudi Arabia's growing economic needs served as a catalyst to introduce a modern education system. It has been argued that several factors related to state formation influence the degree to which education systems are centralised and how rapidly they develop. In his research on education and state formation Green (2013) notes that an impetus for developing a national education system is driven by the need for administrators and engineers, in addition to disseminating national identity and ideology: "to spread dominant national cultures and inculcate national ideologies of nationhood and so to forge the political and cultural unity of burgeoning nation states and cement the ideological hegemony of their dominant classes" (Green, 2013, p. 298). The state of affairs in the early nation building stages in Saudi Arabia falls in line with this argument. As discussed, in the year 1964 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that illiteracy rates among the working Saudi population (over age 15)¹⁷ stood at 95%(Hammad, 1973). Within this context there was a need for economists, scientists, administrators, engineers and technicians "whose existence is indispensable to the development of a modern state" (Shukri, 1972, p. 61)¹⁸.

Education in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam was informal and mostly unwritten and based on the geographical needs of either tribes within the deserts or those who settled in cities. In the desert the most common forms of education revolved around poetry, astronomy and astrology, as well as history of wars. Some vocational education was also available in the form of wool shearing, hunting and tent building

¹⁷ The total population was estimated at 6 million (Al Fahad, 2015).

¹⁸ The scarcity of published resources about the history of Education in Saudi Arabia has led to a reliance on government issued documents and academic masters and doctoral theses (Al Jughaiman and Grigorenko, 2013, p. 308).

(Murtada, 1996). Since the advent of Islam in 690 A.D. the fragmented inhabitants of the peninsula began to form more united communities, centred on Islamic ideals, which emphasised the importance of knowledge and literacy. The traditional form of education in the Arabian peninsula was known as *Kuttab*s which was mainly conducted by religious sheikhs in mosques and focused on teaching basic maths and literacy and especially the Quran (Murtada, 1996; Shukri, 1972). Post-Islamic Arabian Peninsula politics facilitated the expansion of a more formalised education system, however, there was an ongoing struggle, as the focus on Quran and religion predominated. Historically, conflict, poverty and the harsh climate contributed to little attention being given to formal education and the reduction of widespread illiteracy on a large scale. Not much had changed by the time Saudi Arabia began establishing formal government institutions, however, a massive shift was initiated once the oil industry began to grow in the 1960s.

To reconcile economic needs with educational output, the first Saudi secondary school was opened in 1937, and for the first time natural sciences and maths were taught in the Kingdom, mainly by Egyptian teachers (Shukri, 1972). Students were recruited from all over the country and were being trained to attend university abroad and groomed to occupy governmental positions. In 1953 the Directorate of Education was replaced with the MOE to serve the whole country, and between 1953 and 1960 several independent educational authorities were established and formalised. The education system and its administrative organization was closely modelled after the Egyptian one, and was highly influenced by the British educational model which emphasised the importance of general academic education, arguably engraining social biases against manual, craft and technical labour within the system (Hammad, 1973). The education system was developed rapidly to keep up with the state's growth and development.

Although schools initially excluded women, the first government funded school for girls was opened in the early 1960s (Al Jughaiman and Grigorenko, 2013; Hamdan, 2017). Girls' schools were eventually administered separately by the General Directorate for Girls' Education, with a distinct curriculum from their male counterparts. Al

Jughaiman and Grigorenko (2013) note that gender segregation has an ideological connection to state sanctioned Islamic values, and that segregation allows the curriculum to include subjects that are considered more suitable for females such as nursing and teaching. These foundations influence the way young women envision their roles in society and the labour market, and will be discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter but also in the data analysis and discussion chapters. Hamdan (2017) notes that women's education has traditionally been a point of contention, prompting the state to take a gradual approach to expanding and developing it. However, she also notes that despite more limited opportunities for Saudi women historically, two-thirds of Saudi university graduates are women, and by 2017 will comprise 60% of the total number of students in many universities across the Kingdom. Gender segregation, while limiting (and decreasing), has provided a space where culturally conservative families are more inclined to allow their young daughters to engage in, and has thus allowed for women to excel within their specialisations rather than be left out of the equation. Hamdan (2017) also notes that women's success in education and in their careers is shifting conservative tribal norms and traditions.

2.7 Social attitudes toward educational development

One overarching feature of the Saudi education system is the struggle between the needs and wants of the system and those of its beneficiaries, namely, a struggle between the modern and the traditional. From the beginning of the Saudi State's rule, educational policy objectives began with explicit loyalty to Islamic law, ideas, feelings, teachings and the need to abide by their teachings, enforcing Quranic morality (Murtada, 1996).

In today's contemporary education system, the tension between the MEP's objectives and the education system remain obvious. The listed objectives and goals of general education have a strong focus on religious education and values, with limited reference to economic growth or development. The MOE lists the objective of Saudi education as:

To build a proper and integrated understanding of Islam, to implant and propagate the creed of Islam. To inculcate in students the values teachings and ideals of Islam. To support the students to acquire various knowledge and skills. To nurture constructive attitude and behaviour. To develop the society in the domains of economy, culture and maintain societal development. To qualify the individual as a beneficial member of his/her society (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2019).

The Ministry also lists 18 General Education Foundations which are related to Islamic education and values, with few references to work or the labour market (MOE 2019).

The religious scholars, known as the *Ulama*, have been in charge of the education system since its inception (Nolan, 2012; Vassiliev, 2013), and while efforts to reconcile the differences between traditional and modern began early on, giving the education domain to the religious establishment as a conciliatory bargain between the modernising state and religious scholars (in efforts towards political stability) has long reaching economic consequences. As early as three years after establishing the MOE, Shukri (1972) notes that an Egyptian advisor to the MOE commented in 1956 that the curriculum “is devoid of subjects required by the child’s natural growth and his needs of movement, expression and play. It does not train the child to be creative and able to solve problems by himself” (Shukri, 1972, p. 54). There were six different religious classes, five literary ones, two math and two social sciences classes. The suggestion was to integrate religion classes into one subject and the languages studies into one as well. This led to a curriculum revision in 1957 which expanded the curriculum to include physical education, science and hygiene and arts and crafts. Prior to this, science was not taught at the primary level. However, even with such interventions, the influence of religious education remained very strong and the many religion classes remained intact.

The effort to preserve the traditional form of religious education led to a system of rote memory and reliance upon authority, with no room for independent and critical engagement (Shukri, 1972). The strength of the state-endorsed religious traditions,

combined with the power of the tribal-based community structures plus the differences between the town-dwelling and the nomadic Saudi has meant that the intrusive modern developments presented a much more sweeping challenge than modernization has presented elsewhere in the developing world (Shukri, 1972). In his thesis, Shukri argues that new institutions were intrusive on multiple social and religious fronts and were superimposed by formalising a new way of religious and educational order. The massive oil revenues allowed for this new approach to spread very quickly through large infrastructural projects and government spending in urban areas, rather than through a more organic process which might be the case in other parts of the developing world. However, it is also argued that advances in science and technology, even if initially rejected, such as the radio and cars, played a role in introducing new ideas and cultural norms, and the experiences in society began to challenge the traditional ideals.

According to Murtada (1996), modern educational policy had a perverse effect on attitudes and sentiments of Saudis towards education. Schooling was pursued as a vehicle to obtain qualifications that were increasingly necessary for economic participation in the newly organised economic structures. Total dependence of the government on certificate holders, coupled with the widespread belief that the more certificates you have the more competent and intelligent you were added to the problem. The goal of knowledge acquisition was only to obtain certificates and seek social status: "It was not strange then to see that attitudes of disdain and scorn to the practical side of education became a widespread notion in the society." (Murtada, 1996, p. 106).

Oxenham and Oxenham (1984) note that this can be observed in other contexts, where schools in developing countries were developed during bureaucratic development, and schooling was almost inevitably linked to salaried jobs—but not a specific one. Furthermore, since the most coveted first salaried jobs were administrative and required general not vocational education, schooling was divorced from specific skills linked to technical employment. This could partially explain a reluctance to pursue vocationally oriented education, as "Schooling then was not about learning to do jobs,

only about getting or qualifying for jobs. No necessary connection existed between what had to be learned and what would eventually be done” (p. 27). In his study of the development of TVET in post-colonial Ghana, Foster (1965) notes that under-developed economies cannot always absorb trained individuals or employ their skills in areas not directly related to their training. Hammad (1973) noted that Saudis were quick to choose specialisations in religious subjects or humanities despite the need for specialised knowledge in healthcare and technical jobs because these would allow them quick access to government positions where they did not have to compete with foreign labour.

However, the population growth that accompanied economic development appears to have put a strain on Saudi Arabia’s institutions, so that jobs in government agencies began to be more scarce, and educational institution growth did not keep up with population growth. This led to a “tremendous gap between the demand for higher education and the supply offered by higher education institutions” (MOHE 2009, p. 14). By 2010, less than 30% of secondary graduates found a place in universities. (MOE 2016b; MOHE 2011, p. 27).

2.8 The structure of the contemporary education system

Public education is provided for free by the state to male and female students at all levels, including post-graduate and medical studies (Hamdan, 2017). The stages of schooling in the contemporary education system are primary school, intermediary and secondary school, and span across twelve comprehensive school years (See Figure 2-2). Primary lasts from grade 1-6 and usually accepts students from 6-11 years of age (henceforth referred to as primary school). This is followed by intermediate from grades 7-9 accepting students from 12-14 years old (henceforth referred to as intermediate school). And finally, this is followed by secondary for students 15 years of age and lasts for three years (henceforth referred to as secondary school). The general education system in Saudi Arabia for males and females follows a national curriculum at the public and private levels and on some occasions additional government-approved curriculum is included in

private schools (Clark and Mihael, 2012; UNESCO, 2007a). Nearly all schools, universities, and administration offices remain completely gender-segregated including staff and faculty¹⁹ (UNESCO, 2007a). The administration of education and schools is centralised at the MOE, but administered through regional and provincial education bodies, totalling forty two different local offices which include thirteen General Education Departments and twenty nine Provincial Education Administrations, regulated by relevant bylaws (UNESCO, 2007b).

Population statistics indicate that 86% of Saudis continue their formal education after the primary level, 79% continue after intermediate, and 73% continue into secondary (GaStat, 2014). On average, Saudis remain in education for 15.7 years. Only 10% of the Saudi population is enrolled in private schools, and as of 2017, between 1% and 3% of secondary students in Saudi Arabia attend vocational/technical secondary schools (GaStat, 2017). The statistics indicate that the general trend is to either exit education after receiving a secondary diploma, as 36% of the Saudi labour market hold only secondary degrees as their highest qualification, or they prefer to continue on to a Bachelor's Degree program (33% of labour force), and they appear to generally skip the TVET route (less than 10% of the labour force). Empirical research explaining these statistics remains scarce and could provide useful insight into how perceived and fixed opportunities influence avenues of career progression and the value of different certifications, hence the focus of this thesis.

At the primary and secondary levels, the Saudi education system is highly standardised, as curriculum, budgets, training, and examinations are more or less uniform and centrally managed at the MOE, with limited autonomy at the regional levels

¹⁹ With few exceptions in private schools and universities.

(UNESCO, 2007b)²⁰. Students' grade point averages (GPAs) are granted at the school level, with no external moderation, and this remains the main indication of ability and academic standing throughout their secondary schooling (Al Subaihi, 2016). However, tertiary admissions are granted using a weighted calculation of secondary scores and nationally set and externally moderated standardised test results, with little tracking and moderating, resulting in a vague idea of one's academic standing in relative terms (Al Musaiibeh, 2016) (See Section 2.8.2).

The standard Saudi curriculum has been criticised locally for not preparing young people for life or meaningful work (Al Issa, 2009). The curriculum is centrally established at the Ministry, and textbooks tend to reflect and disseminate the interests of the state (Kattan, 2017). The content of the Saudi curriculum has been questioned for political reasons on several instances. It often leaves very little room for critical engagement and communicates a very distinct citizenship role, governed by the state's interpretation of Islam and a set of values. Internationally, the curriculum has been criticised for being religiously intolerant and inciting hatred despite claims of revision (USCRIF, 2018). Most of the taught subjects are delivered through rote memorization (Hooley, 2017). The subjects offered to young men and women vary, but the core subjects offered in the foundational year of secondary include religious studies, Arabic, maths, English, social studies, ICT, professional and life skills, family and health education. Individual performance is graded using a 100-point ranked scale, with 95-100 being the highest ranking "excellent" and anything below 50 constituting failure. The grades are awarded through summative tests as well as coursework (MOE, 2016a). See Section 2.8.1 for more details on tracks and transitions throughout secondary school.

²⁰ Variations exist depending on population density, rural and urban differences, staff and regional governors, and access to facilities and local industrial support. In 2017, 21% of Saudi students lived more than five kilometres away from a school (p.40)

Guidance counselling, while offered in theory is limited, ineffective and mostly pastoral in nature rather than related to careers (Al Ghamdi, 2010; Hooley, 2017). Despite efforts to introduce careers guidance, these have been fragmented both in administration and reach (Hooley, 2017). Al Ghamdi (2010) notes both a lack of careers guidance training, facilities and proper settings for counsellors in schools as well as a reluctance from parents to engage in counselling due to a stigmatised status of 'counselling' for problematic students. In her study, Al Ghamdi (2010) notes that the few counsellors that were available in some schools felt that their role was not taken seriously by the administration, the parents or the students.

Before merging into the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2015, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) had issued a series of 40 programs under the umbrella title "Afaq" meaning "Horizons" that were set to be achieved by 2029 as a "future plan for university learning in Saudi Arabia" (MOHE, 2013). The plan, launched in 2013, outlines the optimal number of graduates at different education levels from the MOE's perspective, therefore enacting plans to facilitate progression along these pathways for students. The figures in Table 2-1 represent how the MOE envisioned the overall composition of the labour force:

Higher Education Degrees (5-year degree or above) ²¹	55% of entrants
Community College Degrees (2-year diploma)	15% of entrants
Technical and Vocational School (2-year diploma)	25% of entrants
Secondary Degrees	5% of entrants

Table 2-1 Horizons qualifications targets

The Horizons plan states that 38% of secondary graduates should enter into technical and vocational schools and 58% should go into community colleges and higher

²¹ Most Bachelor's degrees include a foundation year and are five years in length.

education institutes, as this would be “almost in line with the global average” (TVTC, 2014).

It is unclear how different qualifications are valued in the labour market, and whether exiting formal education was final, or if students could change their minds. Efforts to overcome this have been attempted in the form of a national qualifications framework. In 2013 a joint project between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC) was launched with several objectives to increase technical and regulatory capabilities in managing the educational process in the Kingdom. One other objective is to establish a national framework for qualifications that “achieves effective linkage between the outputs of the educational system and the requirements of development and labour market” (UNDP, 2014). These plans are indicative of a linear pathway and do not leave room for happenstance or a change of course. To achieve these objectives, it is unclear whether the students’ aspirations were taken into consideration, or what restrictions would be put into place, and on whom in order to meet outlined targets.

Furthermore, the goals of the education system (See 2.6), at least on paper do not reflect an effort to equip students with the skills the economic policymakers say are in demand. Parallel institutions have been developed to achieve some of the economic objectives related to the education system. Saudi Arabia has attempted to circumvent the traditional bureaucratic governance of the MOE by establishing a private company called Tatweer Education Holding Company in 2012 to implement education reforms. Tatweer has managed teacher training reforms and curriculum development since its establishment in an effort to support the MOE in ‘elevating’ the education system and reaching the country’s development goals (Tatweer Education Holding, 2015). This entity may be more equipped to achieve the Vision 2030 and National Transformation Programme’s objectives for the MOE which include an objective to: “Establish positive values and build an independent personality for citizens. Provide citizens with knowledge and skills to meet the future needs of the labour market” (CEDA, 2016, p. 60).

The National Transformation Programme also sets targets related to enhancing international performance on TIMSS and PISA tests, involving students in extracurricular activities, as well as increasing the number of students in non-government higher education. It is unclear what action plans are enacted within the MOE to achieve these goals, or whether the MOE continues to be guided by its stated objectives and goals, especially at the school level.

2.8.1 Transitions during secondary school

In the traditional secondary school structure, the first year of secondary is considered a foundation year, and then students are asked to choose either a scientific or literary track within general secondary. Male students can choose either an industrial, commercial or agricultural (vocational) track, which are only offered in certain specialised secondary schools (See figure 2-2 (UNESCO, Clark and Mihael, 2012; 2007a)). Choice of track is voluntary, and while it may be based on the advice of teachers, administrators and parents, there are no attainment requirements for choosing one track over the other. However, students are only allowed to change a track once. At the end of three years of the secondary school, students sit school administered examinations. These examinations were centralised and issued from the MOE until 2007, and were required to obtain a secondary diploma, which is necessary to apply to state universities and colleges (Al Amudi, 2007; MOHE, 2011)

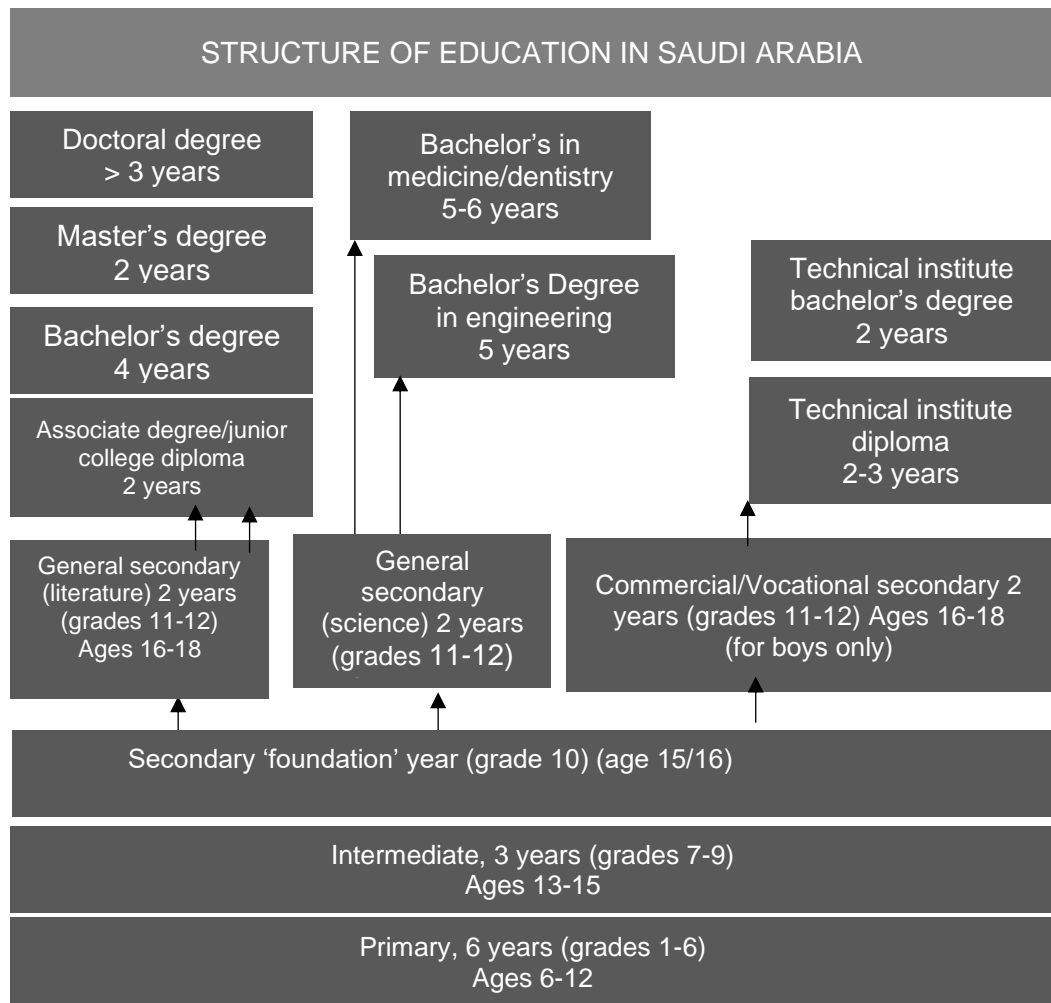


Figure 2-2 Available Transition Pathways

For the first time in the secondary school system, a modular secondary system called the *Muqararat System* was piloted in 2004/5 and was gradually rolled out over several years in different secondary schools (Al Shamekh, Al Fraih and Al Abdulkarim, 2007). In 2018, it was announced that all schools would now implement the new system completely phasing out the one described above by 2021 (MOE, 2018). Within this system, students study fewer subjects per term in greater depth, and have the option of completing secondary school in as little as 2.5 years. The system allows students to select modules of their choice upon completion of core requirements. It allows students to select from a science or humanities track, but also allows for a hybrid track combining

the two as well (MOE 2018). The Muqararat system²² provides secondary students with more choices at the secondary level and aims to increase their overall academic attainment, and to decrease failure levels “which leads to psychological, social and economic problems” (MOE, 2018). After the fifteen-year pilot, data regarding the results of implementing Muqararat is unavailable to the public, and it is unclear whether it offers a smoother transition from secondary to tertiary education. It is also unclear whether students prefer the modular process and the new curriculum, or if there is a benefit to the new system as it relates to admissions requirements at the tertiary level.

Throughout the secondary pathway students have several opportunities to make choices about their next steps, but there are few administrative barriers and the students self-select their preferences. Both science and literature are considered general secondary tracks, but each has a different set of subjects with some overlapping modules, and differences in curriculum for men and women (UNESCO, 2007a).

The secondary school system is organised in a way that is supposed to narrow the students’ focus and prepare them for tertiary education. The junctures in secondary include choice of school, choice of track, choice of private, public or international curriculum, choice to move schools or tracks, choice of night schooling, choice of home schooling, and they also include choices related to attainment such as repeating a module or a grade level, or dropping out, amongst other life choices. However, these options are generally not restricted or based on attainment, ability testing or guidance counselling. Open access to different secondary tracks (science, literature, administrative, Quranic) thus masks the resulting future restrictions on choices at the post-secondary level. There are no natural exits from secondary school until the final transition to tertiary education or into the labour force (UNESCO, 2007b).

²² The Muqararat system was implemented in a minority of the schools that are included in the sample of this thesis.

Furthermore, despite the standard national curriculum, the application of education policies and procedures is reportedly far from uniform, due to the introduction of reforms as well as individual school quality and integrity. A 2013 report by the National Centre for Assessment published the results of a study that showed that the best results on standardised tests were in the schools of the three main urban centres: Riyadh, the Western Province and the Eastern Province (Al Baez, 2013). The study also reported that students in private schools performed better than public ones. The Eastern Province was the best performing region and 21% of its schools were considered in the top 200 performing schools. Schools in other regions did not make the top 200 list at all. The study questioned these variations considering that the standardised secondary tests claim to provide a baseline to measure school performance as well as the performance of individual students. It also raised the important question about the lower chances of getting into tertiary education for students with poorer scores in regions that did not make the top 200. These statistics raise questions about the suitability of the test, the resources in schools, and the resources individuals have to prepare for them.

With increased educational reforms, changes that take place in each school are administered centrally from the MOE, and the decisions of what to implement and when tend to be far removed from the experience of the administrators, teachers and students in schools who arguably have a better understanding of their specific needs. Several education reforms have led to the introduction of different procedures related to modules, testing and teacher training which have created an uneven landscape (Al Issa, 2009). Implementation of reforms happens gradually, and due to the number of schools and teachers, the schools in which reforms are implemented first will have an advantage over those who are lower down the list, assuming that the reform is effective. The National Strategy for the Development of General Education listed several reform areas that were to be developed over the course of several years between 2011-2017, beginning with some schools and teachers before others, inevitably exposing some schools before others (MOE, 2011). This intermittent application of reforms and variations in curriculum

means that some schools will have access to more technology, careers guidance, and fresh teacher training, while others do not, depending on the policies being tested. English is also taught in all schools at varying levels, with a greater focus in private schools, putting young people who do not study English at a disadvantage as it is often the primary communication language in universities and the private sector (UNESCO, 2007a). While the statistics and number of schools who implement new reforms and strategies are not published by the MOE, the gradual implementation of the Muqararat system is one illustrative example of the availability of different policies and curriculum in a system that presents itself as 'standardised'.

Furthermore, the integrity of school-level policies is questioned by the centralised education administration bodies, and mechanisms are put in place to undermine micro-level efforts (Al Baez, 2013). The National Centre for Assessment is testament to this, as the introduction of standardised tests was meant to eliminate the mismatch between secondary scores and students' abilities (Al Musaibeeh, 2016). When centralised testing was replaced with school-level capstone tests, the Ministry began administering a standardised test called *Qudurat* to add a filtration level for universities (Al Subaihi, 2016). Secondary scores were not trusted by universities that were suspicious of overt leniency, grade inflation and wastas (See Section 2.3). Therefore, at the end of secondary school, standardised university admissions tests were introduced to 'level the playing field' (Al Musaibeeh, 2016). These test scores, in combination with the GPA, are used by universities to issue offers to the students. A marketing pamphlet from the National Centre for Assessment titled *Do We Need the Qudurat Test* highlights some of the reasons the test was introduced (National Centre for Assessment) (See Appendix 19). It states that the standardised test gives students an idea of the nature of their academic abilities, as well as giving universities insight into the abilities of students to succeed academically, especially in the most competitive specialisations. The pamphlet highlights the way the test has solved the problem of inaccuracies of secondary scores and has provided a necessary filtration mechanism to save students whose 'failures

would span over several years ending in their leaving university or graduating well after the specified timeframe, with very low GPAs that did not qualify them to be competitive in the labour market' (National Centre for Assessment, p. 1). These standardised tests have been used at the end of secondary school in an education system that does not have a built-in guidance system, and has lacked formal tracking mechanisms and assessments that indicate academic standing at an earlier stage along the academic journey aside from the distrusted school-level grades. Access to specific kinds of capital and wastas can illuminate some of the reasons for this mistrust, an area that will be further explored in the empirical findings.

Despite the unequal chances that are a result of secondary school actions, choices made in secondary school can lead to permanent restrictions to accessing future employment routes. For example, students who struggle academically can choose to go to a vocational secondary industrial institute, but also can choose to remain in general secondary. For those who go to a vocational secondary, they now only have the option to continue their education along the TVET route within the Saudi tertiary education options, which means they can go to a private college, a public vocational college or polytechnic, or seek employment, but they cannot apply to university. While this may mean that they can maximise their choice and excel in this path, it also means that they cannot easily reverse their choices.

2.8.2 Transitions into tertiary education

The options for tertiary education are public and private universities, community colleges, public or private TVET institutes and polytechnics, and ad-hoc training courses from different training providers that are licensed by the government entity responsible for vocational training, the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC). Access to a Bachelor's degree program in Saudi universities is available to the highest achieving students in terms of academic attainment. The programs last for four or five years (See Figure 2-2). TVET institutes offer 2 to 3-year specialised programs ending in an

intermediate/junior college diploma with an applied training component (MOHE 2011, p. 24).

For the most competitive universities, students are requested to list their top fifteen subjects on their application, submitted through a centralised portal in most parts of the Kingdom (KFUPM, 2019; KSU, 2019), and students are then distributed into programs based on their secondary attainment and standardised test scores (Saudi Economic Channel, 2017). Those applicants who are not admitted into any of their preferences are referred to community colleges, followed by technical and vocational colleges, or rejected from all public tertiary institutes (Saudi Economic Channel, 2017). Those who gain access to universities and more selective specialisations such as medicine and engineering also gain access to the prestige that accompanies this. Those who fail then seek access to the sometimes less competitive but more expensive private university education if they have the financial resources.

In public universities in the central region, for instance, only around 55% of the applicants to public universities are accepted into a Bachelor's degree program. Of these, around one quarter are successful in obtaining their first choice of specialisation. Around 20% of applicants are offered a place in a community college, and the rest are rejected, with the suggestion that they apply for a place in the public vocational training institutes (Saudi Economic Channel, 2017). Admission to universities is based on a formula that combines weighted calculations of students' secondary grades and their scores on Qudurat tests. Officials note that the centralised portal and the Qudurat tests act as a filtration system to only accept the highest achieving students into university, and believe that the system creates external accountability and solves the problem of grade inflation and subjective preference by rendering secondary grades as marginal (Saudi Economic Channel, 2017). However, they also admit that there is little transparency in the selection process, and some applications are still processed manually (Saudi Economic Channel, 2016). In 2017, 66.75% of all students enrolled in university were in a humanities, social sciences or business administration

specialisation. 98.5% of all engineering and related fields' graduates are male, and 72% of all humanities graduates are female.

The predominant social and policy narrative surrounding education pathways in Saudi Arabia communicates open access to post-secondary education. One newspaper headline reads "93% of secondary students gain access to university" (Shar, 2017), but only upon closer inspection does that same article show that only 55% of those students who were accepted into public tertiary programs were accepted into a Bachelor's Degree program, and the remainder were diverted to community or technical colleges. The headline was highlighting that most students pursue post-secondary education but was misleading as it gave the impression that universities had the capacity to offer places to 93% of all students graduating from secondary school. The system is thus set up with the premise that the most preferable pathway is a university one, regardless of specialisation, and failure to access university sends a message that vocational institutes are the place for those who fail to gain admissions to university or cannot afford to apply to a private one.

Strict admissions criteria across all tertiary institutions limits opportunities and choices, as students are continuously pushed down the hierarchical admissions ladder, from the top universities to satellite campuses, to community colleges, to vocational institutes, and faced with even more restrictions. The policy of deferring university applicants to vocational colleges has not solved the higher education capacity issue, as many young students do not get accepted to vocational colleges either, and vocational colleges do not have the capacity to absorb 45% of secondary graduates. Only 30% of those who apply to one of the 84 technical colleges, also through a centralised portal, receive an offer (TVTC, 2016a).

While at the secondary level choices tend to be based on preference, opening doors for the best performing students to pursue their aspirations, these secondary preferences can also be considered a liability for students due to the limitations they may experience as a result of them if they did not perform to the required academic attainment

standards. A student may go into the science track in hopes of becoming an engineer, however, the number of applicants outweighs the capacity in universities. This means that unless the student has outstanding secondary school academic performance, he/she is most likely not going to be considered at all. Many universities stipulate a cumulative secondary GPA of 90% (King Saud University for Medical Sciences, 2019). The tertiary transition pathway is considered a high-stakes one, admissions to tertiary institutes is centralised and opaque and decisions at this education juncture create further future uncertainty related to social and economic opportunities.

2.9 Vocational education in Saudi Arabia

There are several ways to pursue TVET in Saudi Arabia, mostly at the tertiary level. TVET can be pursued as an alternative to general secondary school in a Secondary Industrial Institute, or upon completion of secondary school in a tertiary public or private TVET institute (See 2.8.1). Secondary Industrial Institutes and Vocational Colleges are managed by the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), (and not the MOE) in every region of the country (See Appendix 2) and offer students a stipend throughout their attendance. TVET covers industries such as management and administration, engineering technology, computer technology, construction, cosmetology, welding, electricity and general studies (MOHE, 2011).

There are three categories of training institutes at the tertiary level managed by TVTC:

1. 'Colleges of technology' (COT) which is the official name of public technical and vocational colleges that offer courses to young men and women in specialised public tertiary facilities.
2. 'International colleges of excellence' which were launched in 2013, are training institutes established in cooperation with international colleges from countries around the world.
3. Strategic partner institutes, which are for-profit privately-owned training institutes licensed through the TVTC.

Two other avenues for pursuing technical and vocational training lie outside the TVTC at the tertiary level. There are four colleges specialising in technical and industrial fields run by a body called the Saudi Royal Commission. Established in 1975, the Royal Commission is independent of all Saudi Ministries and has its own budget, established to manage industrial cities to grow the energy sector (Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, 2019). Finally, students can attend applied community colleges within universities which offer technical two-year diplomas, but generally have to pay for these programmes rather than receive a bursary (See for example King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), 2019).

Two of the main distinguishing characteristics of industrial and vocational education are both the number of years students study as well as the certification that they are awarded at the end of the course. While this distinction has blurred with the introduction of Bachelor's degree programs in the Colleges of Technology, TVET traditionally offered two-year diplomas while universities offered qualifications after a minimum of four years. Students may apply to public and private TVET Institutes after they graduate from secondary school through a centralised online portal (TVTC, 2016b).

Technical and vocational colleges have traditionally been less selective, but also tend to have lower intake capacity (See 2.8.2). Official numbers of secondary graduates, as well as the number of applicants to the different education pathways are not centrally reported by the MOE and the TVTC, yet available statistics from the MOE indicate that between 350,000-370,000 male and female students graduate from secondary each year (Shar, 2017) and the total number of applicants to all TVTC COTs in 2014-15 was 270,608 (See 2.8.2). Statistics indicate that the demand for TVET outstrips supply, since only around 20-30% of applicants are successful (TVTC, 2014; TVTC, 2016a).

Furthermore, attrition rates have been estimated at as high as 65% (Al Yaum Newspaper, 2010)²³.

TVET institutes have existed in Saudi Arabia in different forms since the 1940s (Murtada, 1996, p. 42). In the early 1960s the Saudi government requested funding from the United Nations' "Special Fund Project" for a higher level training scheme in which it estimated that most technical personnel in the Kingdom are from abroad (Aslam, 1962). At the request of the Saudi government, the ILO and UNESCO sent a team of experts to review the status of vocational and technical training in the country. At this time, it was noted that "strong efforts are being made to train Saudis in various trades". It was recognised that the yet to be established vocational and technical schools could not fulfil the needs of the country in the short amount of time needed, and recommended that apprenticeship schemes, on the job training and accelerated training be introduced to shorten the process of qualifying Saudis to replace foreigners (Aslam, 1962). The inter-agency delegation recommended that at the national level an advisory council of vocational training and technical education be established and a survey of the 'manpower' situation be undertaken. At the local level, training should be introduced for different industries (automobile, electrical, building, maintenance and repair and construction). In the following decade, Shukri (1972) commented in his PhD thesis:

At present, vocational education is regarded as appropriate for relatively unsuccessful pupils in Saudi Arabia. One reason for this is that the apprenticeship system is still in vogue; industrial development is still in its infancy; and most important, perhaps, the regular secondary certificate leads to government white-collar positions of security and prestige, and thus is regarded as a way of release from manual occupations which are regarded as inferior to secondary activities" (Shukri, 1972, p. 151).

²³ As updated drop-out rates are unclear, the Saudi Consultative Council's economic committee has requested more transparent reporting in future reports (Al Blewi, 2014).

TVET policies progressed slowly during the course of economic development in Saudi Arabia. This is often attributed by analysts and scholars either to a negative view of manual labour within the Saudi culture (Shukri, 1972, p. 50), the lower currency of a vocational certificate in the labour market, or the equating of TVET with low achieving students. In his PhD thesis, Hammad (1973) noted that Saudis are quick to choose specialisations in religious subjects or humanities:

The country is in dire need of people graduated from vocational and technical institutes. Although some occupations were admired, others were disdained and devalued. They disdained goldsmiths and blacksmiths but they respected commerce and agriculture. Most of the degrading jobs were done by slaves or by immigrants (Murtada, 1996, p. 16).

Economists also analysed the small numbers of Saudis in the TVET sector, offering a set of explanations and recommendations. The first economic plan (MEP, 1970) highlighted a need for training to fill the demand for all occupations, and also mentioned the need for “guidance in order to encourage respect for productive manual labour.” Subsequent economic plans continued to push for TVET expansion (MEP, 1975; 1980; 1985; 1990; 1995; 2000; 2005; 2010). However, the literature stresses TVET is generally considered to be equated with of low status and is meant for students who perform poorly in academic attainment. The disdain in the Saudi context is often attributed to the types of people who performed the jobs historically rather than the job itself (Murtada, 1996, p. 16). Similarly, Mellahi (2000) concluded that:

Social and cultural values are found to be very strong in discouraging students from acquiring vocational skills leading to skilled manual jobs. Students perceive that their pride and social acceptance are related to the type of work they do and the sector they work in. They argue that Saudi families and *Bedouin* tribes take pride in not being involved in manual work associated with dirty work practices (Mellahi, 2000, p. 339).

Efforts to overcome these prevailing sentiments came in the form of increased policies related to TVET. The organisational structure of vocational education was formalised in 1980, when a special body called the General Organisation for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTVET) was established to oversee male TVET. Furthermore, in 2005 GOTVET was replaced by the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) and became responsible for female training²⁴ as well as male training. TVTC governs technical and vocational training in Saudi Arabia through 272 institutes across the Kingdom. TVTC also oversees the 910 institutes in the private sector (See Appendix Two). As of 2014, 77,388 students had enrolled in vocational educational bodies, with 28,797 total graduates. The 2014 annual report (TVTC, 2014) cited 26.4% enrolment increase of students graduating from secondary schools (p. 19) and a 15% increase in graduates from the institutes compared to the previous year (p. 20). Although these are improvements, the numbers indicate that only 37% of enrolled students tend to finish their course.

In the contemporary economic reform climate, government expenditure on TVET is part of Saudi Arabia's overall strategy to lower unemployment, achieve higher economic diversification (MEP, 2015, p. 89) and work toward building a 'knowledge economy' (MEP, 2013; MEP 2015, p. 89). The investment in TVET assumes that more Saudis will enrol in the programs, achieve certifications, and work in related fields. However, as Saudi Arabia continues to invest in and grow its technical and vocational education and training system, young people are not responding at the expected rates, and by one report up to 94% prefer academic study (Muhammad, 2016).

Other efforts to increase the attractiveness of TVET include a brand of training institutes called the "Colleges of Excellence" (COE) launched in 2012. The COE "were established to be "the leading authority for Applied Training in the Kingdom in

²⁴ Female training was previously the responsibility of the General Directorate for Girls Education.

cooperation with the best international practical training organizations, and by attracting the global faculty” (COE, 2015). The colleges are managed by the TVTC and run through partnerships with training providers with TVET expertise from around the world. The current providers listed on the public website offer courses in colleges for young men and women from age 16, with specializations such as business administration, IT, food technology, culinary arts, beauty and fashion, health studies, health and safety, fashion design, and electrical and mechanical technology. The colleges have opened in both urban and rural areas.

The vision of the TVTC is to produce graduates with “the quality and efficiency required by the labour market” and by extension to “achieve global leadership that ensures independence and self-sufficiency” (TVTC, 2014, p. 10)²⁵. This vision draws a distinct link between training future employees and economic growth. In 2015, the Saudi budget prioritised investment in ‘Human Resources Development’ (MOF, 2014), expanding programs that “enhance sustainable and strong economic development and employment opportunities for Saudi nationals” (MOF, 2014, p. 1), earmarking USD 57.9 billion towards education, representing 25% of total budget appropriations, and USD 6.5 million on new TVET projects (MOF, 2014, p. 2).

However, despite these efforts, policies provided conflicting messages about the purpose of TVET programs because efforts were uncoordinated. For instance, training programs are classified by the Ministry of Civil Service government qualifications framework (TVTC 2016b), a classification and pay scale structure of 15 levels of government employment (MCS 1977, p. 10), which indicates that government employment is assumed, despite the goal of TVTC to increase skills for private sector technical and industrial work (MOHE 2011, p. 24; TVTC 2016c). Furthermore, 66% of TVET graduates work in the private sector, and the rest are unaccounted for.

²⁵ The TVTC Vision translated from Arabic by author.

Training in the Institutes is primarily by Arab trainers. Many of these are non-Saudi but there is an increasing number of trainers that can be assumed to be graduates of the TVTC colleges. TVTC does not report widely on the qualifications of its training staff or on the content of curriculum. Annual reports continue to focus on quantity and number of trainees and on physical training facilities. The 2018 annual report lists developing the qualifications of trainers as one of its targets that has nearly reached 100% of its key performance indicators. The development of training staff is measured by building capacity (60% of target reached), increasing the number of certified trainers for private institute training (reached 100%), satisfaction levels of trainers (reached 100%, satisfaction level equals 67%) and satisfaction levels of trainees (reached 100% of target, satisfaction level equals 76%) (TVTC, 2018). However, the number of these trainers and their nationalities remain vague and unreported. Within post-secondary education, it is reported that 42% are non-Saudi. However, a 2013 report claims that 82% of the TVTC employees were Saudi. The report is unclear about the breakdown of the employee roles. While the report notes that 100% of administration staff were Saudi, it does not specify the nationalities of faculty (Al Saad, 2013). Within higher education institutes, 60% of teaching staff are Saudi (Alyan, 2014). Empirical evidence from this study notes that most of the trainers are Arab but many are not Saudi. Some are from developed countries but there is no indication that hiring Europeans, for instance, is a widespread practice. Additional research on the qualifications and nationalities of trainers would be necessary to further examine the influence of the trainers of young people's perceptions of TVET as a whole.

Additionally, the TVTC does not acknowledge the varying views young people have of TVET in their reporting, and the policy reforms do not address the social aspects of TVET. However, they also have not focused on updating curriculum or specialisations within the COTs. The 2018 TVTC Annual report includes a discussion of their 'strategic transformation' objectives. The objectives include institutional goals, such as introducing electronic platforms for collaboration between students and their training institutes and

different online platforms. These broader objectives include collaboration with the private sector and the expansion of the admissions capacity of students. They also include more qualitative targets, such as increasing the attractiveness of TVET. The goal was articulated as 'boosting the attractiveness of TVET and raising awareness about its benefits and increasing student's experience'. However, the three indicators used to measure progress towards achieving this goal were far removed from addressing esteem or perception of TVET provisions: a community outreach maintenance training program for the public, a re-branding initiative, and the digital platform to login to student accounts. The report also sets the achievement toward this target at 100%. The TVTC has been successful in re-branding and digitizing its platforms and has been recognised by their achievement on the national level. However, it reports small progress towards most of the qualitative goals including curriculum updates and reforms.

2.9.1 Conclusion

Over the past fifty years, Saudi Arabia has witnessed massive shifts socially, demographically, economically and within its institutions, including education. The developments have placed a number of challenges on historical norms and expectations. Some are explicit and measurable such as the number of women in education, and others less so, as they have not been widely investigated, such as influence on social inequalities or civic engagement. This chapter has traced the development of the current Saudi state from its inception to its contemporary state of reform and development, focusing on the social and economic dimensions governing relationships and values.

Achieving many of the goals of state consolidation and political stability in this tribal and religiously conservative country has been facilitated by an influx of oil wealth and the infrastructure and institutional development that this allowed for. Saudi Arabia is categorised as a high-income country (World Bank, 2017a), and its resources have allowed for massive infrastructure development, mostly with the consultation of foreign

experts and allies. Yet the Saudi economy is still a developing one, relying on oil for 90% of revenues.

Socially, Saudi Arabia hovers on the lower end of freedom, intellectual capacity, and civic participation. A review of the education system as presented here highlights some of the challenges the country has faced in its modernisation efforts. Economic plans to upskill the labour market and meet the goals of economic development and global competitiveness have not met their expected success levels. Saudi Arabia's expenditures on education reform, teacher re-training, curriculum design and TVET development outweigh spending in all other parts of the world (Aboughabal, 2015), but the country has not met its goals of economic diversification away from a single commodity or its goals to successfully replace foreign labourers with Saudis. Saudis continue to aspire to government employment and social status, despite the government's efforts to shift their opportunities and create pathways into industries that they have identified as essential for economic growth.

By situating the education system within the historical social characteristics of the country, one can hypothesise as to why Saudis prefer certain pathways over others. Furthermore, preserving historical ties to social networks gives Saudis access to a form of social capital that circumvents institutions and modern systems if they do not align with aspirations. While education pathway architects and economists work to push young Saudis down specific education-to-work transition pathways, Saudis utilise their *wastas* and social connections to access other destinations that are perceived as more prestigious. Without taking this into consideration, education planning will remain challenging at best. The assumption is that employing foreign unskilled labour in the TVET sectors has painted these jobs and destinations in a less than desirable colour for many Saudis. However, are there inherent characteristics related to TVET fields that Saudis will always reject? Questions remain about the way cultural and historical sentiments are experienced by young people, and the way social networks and value systems influence their perceptions of work and their decision-making process. A review

of youth studies education-to-work transition literature in Chapter Three will allow for a deeper investigation of how decisions are made in context, and the influence social and economic variables have on perceptions of opportunity and the availability of choice.

Chapter 3. **Navigating education and career pathways**

Although the Saudi education system includes varying post-secondary routes for young people, there is a limited understanding of the dynamics of young people's choices at the different transitions they encounter. The previous chapter explored literature related to the historical, social, and cultural features of modern Saudi Arabia and the structure of its education system. These form the backdrop against which students and their families experience contemporary education policies. Despite the ambitious attempts to disseminate a standardised national curriculum, regional variations in employment and economic participation point to the challenges of implementing these goals. Attempts to use educational pathways as a mechanism to produce specific skills needed in the economy have not resulted in the desired outcomes. Efforts to build a strong cohort of Saudi nationals with vocational and technical skills to replace the dominance of foreign labour in related jobs have been met with resistance. This chapter questions this resistance by looking at the way educational transitions are theorised. It will explore the concept of choice and question when, if and how choices are made. When framed by the social and historical characteristics of the country, mismatches between the labour market targets and the choices of young people in Saudi Arabia become clearer. From the early years' question of 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' to choosing a post-secondary specialisation, young people encounter several instances throughout their schooling where decisions and choices must be made. Literature related to youth educational transitions reviewed in this chapter examines choice through several lenses, highlighting the complexity of the decision-making process. This chapter will examine the way researchers theorise educational and career transitions within youth transition literature, and will show how this, in combination with the context introduced in Chapters One and Two will help illuminate the education and career transition patterns of young people in Saudi Arabia.

In order to explore the nature of post-secondary transitions, this chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses three lenses through which educational and career choices are conceptualised: a functionalist instrumental lens that highlights the role of agency, a structural lens that highlights the role of social and institutional forces, and a hybrid lens that combines elements of agency and structure. The second section will introduce the theoretical framework that the thesis draws on to illuminate the complex role of the individual actor and their interaction with their social surroundings when making education and career choices in general, and in TVET. Finally, the chapter will conclude with general comments on debates related to post-secondary transitions in developing economies. It will re-visit the main conceptual elements that will be used to understand the decisions of young Saudis transitioning into TVET, or choosing not to do so.

3.1 Lenses of understanding youth educational transitions

The expansion and increased availability of and access to further and higher education opportunities in the latter part of the twentieth century has sparked a series of debates that strive to explain the ways young people navigate through opportunities of education and work, and the relationship between the two (Brooks, 2009; McGrath, 2018; Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017). Young people's education-to-work transitions are framed by questions of choice. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2011) question the process of career decision-making as one "Of choice or chance?" (p. 173), and the title of Diane Reay's 2001 article about post-secondary education choice asks us to consider whether young people are faced with 'Choices of Degrees or Degrees of choice' (Reay *et al.*, 2001)²⁶. Throughout their lives, young people face several transitional junctures: movement from primary to secondary, choosing one of several academic or vocational routes;

²⁶ Throughout this chapter, choice is explored using the terms education-to-work and career transitions interchangeably.

transitioning out of compulsory schooling and into further or higher education or employment, etc. Depending on the overarching educational systems and frameworks, these options differ in differing countries and contexts, but the junctures remain similar (Raffe, 2003).

Recent studies point to a lack of empirical research on the process of decision-making in education, indicating that not enough is known about *how* individuals make decisions about their educational transitions (Atkins, 2017; Cuconato, 2017b; Cuconato and Walther, 2015; Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017). Transition literature is dotted with studies about pathways and trajectories, often focusing on performance and assessments rather than on the decision-making process itself (Cuconato and Walther, 2015). It is also argued that the nature of decision-making is vague due to a focus on theorising rather than empirical research (White, 2007). Furthermore, the literature that studies transition processes is often polarised, focusing either on the role an individual has in making choices, or on the structural constraints on individual choice (Franceschelli, 2016). The polarised nature of the debate, referred to as the structure-agency debate, has led to efforts to find conceptual tools to analyse the lives of young people in order to overcome a binary understanding and explore the multiple influences of restrictions and choice.

Throughout this thesis I adopt a predominantly sociological perspective on questions of choice, structure and agency (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). I draw on the work of Karen Evans to define agency as a deliberate informed process of “social engagement in which past routines are contextualised and future possibilities envisaged within the contingencies of the present moment” (Evans, 2007, p. 88). By some definitions agency arguably necessitates a capacity to transcend circumstances (See Bandura, 2001). This thesis, however, focuses instead on social engagement, intentionality and foresight.

By structure I am referring to an external, objective force that can influence individual feelings (McLeod and Lively, 2003). This includes socially constructed notions

of gender, socioeconomic status and social class (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996), but also includes institutional frameworks such as labour markets and national education systems (Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017).

These definitions offer ways to conceptualise young people's transition experiences. The theories and debates provide tools to analyse the meanings attached to different education and career routes such as TVET and the resulting influence on decisions. In exploring these lenses in more depth, we can begin to see the complexity of decision-making and the value in looking at decisions through different lenses that may highlight dimensions that are otherwise overlooked. The tools also allow us to investigate the way researchers and policymakers formulate and construct these understandings. They also allow me to illuminate the voices of young people to better understand the role of both the individual and his or her surroundings in shaping dispositions.

3.1.1 A functionalist lens: the role of the individual in decision-making

In the latter part of the twentieth century a critique of a neo-liberal economic lens emphasising the role of the individual has dominated research in the social sciences, including education transitions in both developed and developing economies (Franceschelli, 2016; Hodgson, Spours and Waring, 2011; McGrath, 2018; White, 1997). Within this body of research, the focus is on the individual's role in decision-making, framing choice as a rational trade-off wherein individuals weigh their strengths and abilities, and the pros and cons of their options.

Through this neo-liberal lens, the role of education is as a functional investment for generating economic growth both for the individual and the economy (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Preston and Dyer, 2003; Saunders, 2006; Vogt, 2018). This interpretation of the role of education is known as human capital theory (HCT), and forms the basis for economic and educational policy planning. In HCT people are valued based on their ability to produce, and are utilised for this purpose: humans are a resource, and

education is a means to develop humans as more productive resources (Peers, 2015). Ashton (1996) define HCT as “the proposition that education or training can be regarded as investments with future material pay-offs, analogously to investments in physical capital” (p. 14).

Neoliberalism does not constitute a universal body of practice, but it has influenced the way public services such as education are delivered and managed, commodifying education as a good that can produce employable skills (France, 2016; Franceschelli, 2016). Through this lens, education is commodified, serving a functional role with an assumed linear relationship between an investment in education and skills and economic return (Becker, 1964; Powell, 2005; Preston and Dyer, 2003; Stevens, 1999; Tan, 2014). Education is marketised and politicians pursue ‘efficient use of resources’ (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2011, p. 4) i.e., efficient use of students within education as they become economic inputs to development. It is through this neoliberal HCT lens that young people are often viewed, and therefore assumed to have freedoms to choose, so in that when they fail, the deficit is attributed to the individual, and the burden of the failure is attributed to their personal shortcomings. In this way, the HCT lens marginalises the influence of existing institutional and social structures. Although the individual is a player in the decision-making process, emphasising their role as economic inputs de-contextualises their broader social roles and the possible constraints that interfere with this equation. Viewing individuals in this way assumes that they can and will make very calculated decisions.

3.1.1.1 *Rational decision-making*

HCT presupposes that education and skills are traded in a free market, with the assumption of a supply and demand exchange between a rational decision-maker who actively weighs risks and benefits of his/her academic and employment opportunities in the labour market (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). It is premised on the notion that individuals are free and able to make choices that maximise their own goals as well as maximising those of the broader economic system. The theories developed by Ginsberg

et al. (1951) and Super and Knasel (1981), for instance, formed the basis for career education debates that viewed choice as a matching activity between inherent characteristics and available careers, known as *trait theory*. This theory is underpinned by vocational behaviour psychology and tends to emphasise the importance of psychometric tests that measure vocational interests by querying preferences. Trait theory utilises frameworks and vocational models that are used by guidance counsellors to help match an individual's preferences with ideal careers (Holland, 1997; Super, 1953).

The focus on individual traits further premises that individuals have inherent abilities as well as clear goals and are in tune with their future aspirations, which are accessible to anyone. Career pathways and qualifications are deliberately chosen to maximise outcomes. Müller and Shavit (1998) argue that people value educational qualifications based on linkages to future occupational opportunities in the labour market. Rational decision-makers thus choose routes that will give them access to the jobs that they desire. In making this assumption, qualifications are two sides of the same coin: they symbolise merit because they open up opportunities, and by extension, the lack of them symbolises a deficit and an inability to achieve, thus restricting opportunities.

3.1.1.2 *Skills and the knowledge economy*

Neoliberal policies that assume that individuals are rational decision-makers and consumers of education that are free to make choices view these decision-makers as the inputs to economic productivity. Policies are thus designed in ways that assume that the education system is utilised by these rational decision-makers to gain the skills necessary for the labour market. Policymakers tend to pay close attention to young people's further and higher education pathways because of these assumed linkages (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999). In his discussion of the English skills policy narrative in the UK, Keep (2011) notes elements in this neoliberal narrative that justify this positioning: the global skills marketplace, the trend of international benchmarking, emphasis on the knowledge economy, and the assumption that learning is uniform and

simple. The global nature of economic trade and consumption exacerbate the focus on skills production. Countries are under pressure to compete globally, produce desired products and services, and therefore view the education sector as an investment. Furthermore, achievements are not only measured locally, but best practices are set at a global level and countries are benchmarked against one another. This has led to a race to produce the knowledge that drives the global economy. The global nature of competition and the focus on the knowledge economy highlights the importance of skills and assumes that once education is provided, people will rationally choose the education pathways that produce the skills for global competition purposes.

3.1.1.3 *Decision-making and late modernity*

The view that individuals are rational actors is made possible by a post-modern lens that views social structures as less important and influential than in the past. While social structures were once determining of one's future employment and social status, economic and social development in the twentieth century have led to a breakdown of these institutions and allow people to make more individualised and rational decisions. According to Giddens, modernity erodes the protective framework of small communities, kinship and tradition. Instead, individuals make decisions alone and are subject to threats and dangers in life (Giddens, 1991a; Giddens, 1991b). In his Individualisation Thesis, Beck (1994) argues that in an increasingly individualised world, young people appear to be responsible for making choices despite previously preventative norms and social structures within a period of 'late modernity' (Beck, 1994; Furlong, 2007; Giddens, 1991b). Beck argues that while once overwhelmingly deterministic, a new set of social contracts has given individuals more control over previously limiting structures; young people are increasingly able to write their own 'biographies of self' to navigate through a new set of structural risks and social contracts (Beck, 1994). A 'biography of self' or 'choice biography' is distinguished from more determining past biographies wherein there was a considerably predictable and linear move from youth to adulthood that was distinct according to different social positions. In the post-neoliberal context, a 'late

modern' society in which market-oriented policies and production-based lifestyles dominate (Beck, 1994; Furlong, 2007; Giddens, 1991b), a breakdown of collective arrangements and increased control of individuals over their own lives and choices prevails (Côté, 2002).

3.1.1.4 *Critiques of the functionalist lens*

Rational action is criticised for its neglect of constraints on choice and its lack of engagement with *how* decisions are made, as it overlooks the complexity of the decision-making process (Vogt, 2018). Furthermore, Vogt (2018) argues that the rational-actor lens puts people at a disadvantage because national education systems are designed with the assumption that constraints are easily overcome. Therefore, education options provided for young people at different stages do not always acknowledge the variations in student ability, availability of opportunity and the constraints of social structures such as class, ethnicity and gender.

While the role of the individual is important, studies of youth transitions from school to work highlight the downsides that come with over-emphasizing the individual. Vogt (2018) argues that the emphasis on the role of the individual not only divorces the experience from the process and the context, but also may lead young people to overemphasise their own agency. For instance, colleges that market plumbing to young men and beauty courses to young women make it more difficult for those who fall outside the normal applicant profile to follow a pathway that is less common. It also may make those who go into those specific courses feel like their choices were intentional and deliberate even if they were pressured by forces that were not of their own making. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) refer to this as the 'epistemological fallacy' of individualisation, where young people believe themselves to be more responsible for their failure to achieve their aspirations, rather than contextualise these shortcomings and attribute them to the frameworks in which they are situated.

Viewing young people through a lens where they make decisions rationally, consume opportunities that are in line with their personal traits, and contribute to a global

economy places much of the responsibility for the success of growth and development on the young people. This lens highlights ways that young people bear, and to some degree accept, more responsibility through policy rhetoric that is highly individual. This lens diverts attention away from the social structures that limit and/or prevent young people from choosing the pathways that are arguably the most beneficial to them. It assumes that decision-makers are given uniform opportunities, and if they fail to achieve the most efficient outcomes, they are inherently incapable of achieving more. According to Keep (2011) and Reay (2017), the neoliberal focus on skills perpetuates policies that assume that all individuals can choose their education and employment routes. Researchers such as Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) and (Reay, 2017) argue that education and training do not necessarily lead to economic growth and social prosperity, and that humans do not always act in ways that maximise their own lives or national economic gains (Tan, 2014).

The narrative also tends to blame those who fail within the system, leaving few routes back into education or work once this happens (Reay, 2017). Finally, it raises issues of social justice and fairness, as it pressures individuals to perform to maximise a collective potential, which would mean that individuals that do not succeed are collateral damage.

In summary, emphasising individual agency in decision-making has been criticised for its marginalisation of structural constraints such as gender, class, ethnicity, educational opportunities, etc. (Becker and Hecken, 2009; Coleman, 1988; Preston and Dyer, 2003; Reay, 2017). HCT, the lens that underpins policy formation, assumes that choices are available to all and are a result of rational trade-offs. It highlights ways in which TVET is often used by policymakers as a route for those who cannot achieve desirable outcomes in academic settings. It contributes to the framing of TVET as a necessary route to economic development, and the most efficient use of resources is to reserve it for those who are less able academically. This point will be further discussed in the following sections.

3.1.2 A structural lens: the role of social norms and institutions in decision-making

A very different lens to the functional individualised one of HCT in a post-modern neoliberal world is a structuralist one, in which young people are much more removed from the decision-making process. This lens assumes that existing institutionalised social norms, governing frameworks and embedded social practices influence, guide and sometimes control the way individuals navigate through education transitions in both explicit and implicit ways. This understanding of decision-making challenges the functionalist approach that emphasises an individual's rational decision to maximise outcomes economically.

Coinciding with the rise of neoliberal thought in education, Roberts (1968) argued that social characteristics such as gender, family background, socioeconomic status, etc. push young people down certain pathways while the opportunities in the labour market force them down certain pathways. He refers to these forces as 'opportunity structures' which create distinct career routes that govern young people's progress (Roberts, 2009, p. 355), thus limiting an individual's ability to choose pathways freely. Roberts' arguments were significant within youth transition literature, and led to a shift in the way predominant thinkers viewed the role of the individual in the choice process (White, 2007).

3.1.2.1 Institutional structures

Structuralists view youth progression along state designed post-compulsory education pathways as a process that reproduces social positions and inequalities. The pathways metaphor, developed in response to growing unemployment and extended transitions in Europe in the 1970s (Raffe, 2003), helps illuminate both the way in which social inequalities are reproduced and the way in which the social reproduction process can be made invisible. Institutional frameworks and educational opportunities are structured in a way that reflects many cultural assumptions about social actors such as their gender, class, ethnicity, etc.

In her examination of school to work transitions in Europe, Cuconato (2017b) highlights the relevance of Allmendinger's (1989) theory of educational stratification for understanding the relationship between education systems and future opportunities for employment. Allmendinger argues that selection of educational track either enhances or limits future employment opportunities. Access to education influences the opportunities available in the future more than economic pull or individual choice. The empirical research conducted by Allmendinger (1989) in Germany, Norway and the United States confirms that 'the relative standing of a person at the beginning of the career trajectory is not only the outcome of individual educational attainment but also of the organizational structure in which educational credentials have been awarded' (Allmendinger, 1989, p. 244).

Allmendinger develops a theory for understanding the relationship between education structures and future employment opportunities. She illustrates how different features of an education system and the education environment influence choices during primary, secondary and tertiary education, and the transition into the labour market. Allmendinger examines the way education systems provide choice, and the degree to which the timing, finality and consequences of choices either create or limit opportunities for young people. Individual choices are thus shaped by the environment choices are made in. This theoretical lens is useful for illuminating how features of the Saudi education system shape and influence choice and aspirations for young people. Allmendinger argues that transitioning out of a comprehensive secondary system into a restrictive tertiary one tends to systematically restrict future options (Allmendinger, 1989).

Structuralists argue that inequalities and disadvantages are sustained through the education system, and education is a controlling mechanism. Following this line of argument, the education system will not likely produce skills that are transferable, rather it will prepare young people for the labour market that is structured in the same way as the controlling education system. Bowles and Gintis (1976) use the metaphor of

'correspondence' to explain this, and argue that the education structure is paralyzing and young people therefore "collude in their own exploitation" (Saunders, 2006, p. 6).

In Saudi Arabia, the selective tertiary admissions process in universities acts as a filtration system for those who were unable to meet the tertiary admissions requirements. This process frames post-secondary opportunities hierarchically, thus perpetuating the status of different opportunities in relation to one another. When TVET is positioned as a second or third choice, its status as inferior is perpetuated. Furthermore, tying this to previous encounters within the education system that are not changeable creates a 'path dependency' that tends to perpetuate a lack of 'parity of esteem' between academic and TVET education (Kersh, 2015; Raffe, 2003).

3.1.2.2 *The role of gender in decision-making*

Gender norms tend to govern transitions of young men and women despite individual preferences. Within feminist literature, there is a belief that male dominance is near-universal and is enabled by structural forces that are concealed, operating within a global patriarchal model (Kabeer, 2001). The roles of men and women in society are socially constructed and deeply embedded in the way their lived-realities unfold. Kabeer (2001) notes that the social meaning that is ascribed to women by other social actors becomes a foundation of a woman's identity, and the rules and practices that promote specific translations of biological differences tend to constrain social practices. The dominant discourse on gender highlights women's limited access to participation in certain educational or employment opportunities, especially within patriarchal societies (Oliver, 2011). Blossfeld *et al.* (2015) note that while women's increased participation in the economies of developed countries is attributed to more egalitarian principles through the process of globalization, evidence suggests that the gender differences persist .

Furthermore, families serve as systems for organising resources and roles and responsibilities, governed by 'social rules' that delineate the distribution of authority and status. This can often effect choices of education and work as women are globally seen to be primarily responsible for the care of the family and entitlement to material resources

is mainly accorded to men (Kabeer, 2001). But the resources at women's disposal to negotiate the practices and familial relations take different forms across time and place, making what woman can and cannot do variable across different historical and cultural contexts. Young men and young women in industrialised countries still choose specialisations that are considered gender appropriate and participation in education, training and work is still characterised by gender stereotypes (See Fuller and Unwin, 2014; Wilde and Leonard, 2018).

Understanding the intersection of gender with other social influences such as socioeconomic status and different social backgrounds is essential to analyse the complex obstacles that women face. While this thesis does not use intersectionality as a framework, it acknowledges the importance of highlighting discourses that legitimise existing power relationships (Carbado *et al.*, 2013; Crenshaw, 1996). It also seeks to show the complex interaction of different social positions in framing aspirations and behaviour.

Opportunity structures (Roberts, 1968) differ for individuals within the transitional landscape, and despite individual efforts, socially constructed characteristics related to gender (and other social markers) either facilitate the formation of aspirations and pursuits or limit them. The question of choice and agency is essential to understanding the role of women in society. Gendered practices may be limiting for those who attempt to access opportunities that are 'reserved' for others. These limits are often invisible, as they are embedded albeit controlling. Wyn and White (1998) look at agency through the definition of the participant: if they believe they are free then they are considered as such, and claiming that women are unaware of the restrictions on their choices is arguably patronizing.

3.1.2.3 *Critiques of the structural lens*

A structural approach, where the influence of social institutions such as family and gender is considered dominant is arguably overly deterministic, as very little weight is given to the individual's ability to make choices within the structure. This focus discounts

deliberate choices that are made as not of their own making. In her study of women's desire to achieve a respectable status through work, Skeggs (1997) notes how the women in her study do not necessarily aspire to class and respectability because they lack it, but they do this because they are taught they have to maintain a socially acceptable version of themselves while at the same time achieving contemporary markers of success. Women make trade-offs in order to project an image of themselves that is acceptable to society. Yet despite the motivation, the choices are a form of social engagement and intentionality.

Through a structuralist lens, education is a site where social positions and relations are maintained and perpetuated, the concept of social reproduction is brought to the forefront, and access to certain kinds of education is the result of privilege and inequality (Becker and Hecken, 2009; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997; Reay, David and Ball, 2005). Rational and cognitive explanations for decision-making offer a limited understanding of a student's ability to choose and give little weight to the social conditions and limitations such as those seen with gender. The same can be said for other social positions such as class and ethnicity (Blustein, 2001; Wettersten et al., 2005). However, because gender takes a central role in the analysis of the data in this thesis, I have focused here on the social influences of gender more than class and ethnicity.

Viewing young people's decisions through this lens marginalises the intentional choices that are made within limiting structures. While young people are indeed situated within institutional structures and influenced by social factors such as gender and class, this lens would make it difficult to analyse ways in which young people make deliberate choices. It would also make it difficult to understand how TVET decisions are viewed and experienced differently by individuals. To answer the research questions about perceptions and experiences, a theoretical framework that acknowledges structural restrictions as well as individual agency would be more suitable.

3.1.3 A hybrid lens: decision-making between structure and agency

A theoretical framework that combines elements of structure and agency would allow for an in-depth analysis of young people's experiences as individuals within their social structures. White (2007) argues that an overreliance on theory has perpetuated the dichotomisation of structure and agency rather than illuminate the interplay between the two. Although limited, many empirical studies on education transitions indicate that the choices youth make are influenced by existing structures, while also acknowledging the interaction between the context and one's identity, beliefs, and aspirations (i.e. their agency). Evans (2007) argues that while the underlying structural features of young people's realities may make it difficult for them to exercise agency and choice, social and educational policies can actually reduce these constraints (Evans, 2007) and allow for a form of agency that is limited, which she refers to as 'bounded agency' (p. 93).

Furthermore, the large volume of literature that examines the uncertainty that young people encounter in times of life transitions (See Ryan, 2001) highlights how an empirical examination of academic transitions can shed light on aspirations, opportunities, and limitations related to individual choices as well as social constraints (Evans and Helve, 2013).

The theory of *Careership* has been utilised wholly or in part by sociologists of education in several contexts to explore the complexities of young people's decisions (Allin and Humberstone, 2004; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Bloomer, 1997; Davies and Tedder, 2003; Harrison and Waller, 2018; Morison, 2008; Reay *et al.*, 2001; Scandone, 2018). The next section will discuss this theory in more depth, and highlight its utility as a tool to explore empirical data for the purpose of answering my research questions.

3.2 Careership: A theoretical framework for understanding educational decisions

Careership, a sociological theory of career decision-making, developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) in their empirical study of young people in a training scheme in the UK in the 1990s, situates individual decision-making within a structural context that views decisions as pragmatic, combining rationality, serendipity and socially constructed opportunities and limitations. The theory unwraps the social meanings of career choice as generated by the decision-makers themselves and argues that the decisions are more pragmatic than technically rational. Pragmatic decisions interweave the concepts of Bourdieu's habitus, field and capital into the concept of a 'horizon for action' that changes over the course of one's life. These Bourdieusian concepts are central to the careership theory, and therefore will to be explored in more depth:

3.2.1.1 *Habitus*

Habitus is a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) referring to a set of internalised dispositions, beliefs, principles and actions that result from interactions with his/her surroundings. Individuals are engaged in a reflexive relationship with the objective social structures in which they live, so that both continuously influence each other. Bourdieu's concept of habitus differs from identity in that it is not something that lives intrinsically inside an individual, but is a set of embodied dispositions that define oneself, generated through everyday interactions and encounters, expressed openly but often subconsciously, and further perpetuated through the way one's behaviours, actions and language are perceived by others. It generates perceptions, appreciations and practices. Bourdieu's habitus allows for a deeper understanding of individual choices and behaviours: choice cannot be decontextualised. Indeed, to understand the way in which decisions are made, one cannot understand choice without probing more deeply into what formulates habitus: one's family history, relationships, experiences, expressed views, likes and dislikes.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, one's habitus is affected by the social and economic history of Saudi Arabia, so that tribal affiliations, geographic origin, religion, gender and socio-economic status influence one's identity. For instance, gendered behavioural norms related to the mixing of sexes influence both male and female's choices depending on the workplace. As Maton (2014) points out, social practices are characterised by regularities, but there are no written social rules that dictate these practices. However, habitus can answer the question of how behaviour can be regulated without being the result of direct obedience to rules. Habitus allows features of aspirations to be made more visible, and it allows for ways to shed light on how multiple intersecting dimensions of social identity and social structures shape evolving and shifting aspirations (Scandone, 2018). It also allows the researcher to explore links between individual and collective experiences and the interconnections of the past and future.

3.2.1.2 *Field*

Habitus is formed as a result of interactions in what Bourdieu refers to as the field: the social structures in which people exist and with which they have a reflexive relationship (Reay et al., 2005, p. 22). Bourdieu's field is the social space in which interactions, power struggles, alliances and negotiations take place, and where the 'rules of the game' are determined by those interactions together with formal regulations. There is an argument that Bourdieu's work is deterministic and dwells too much on the reproductive aspects of fields and not their changeability (Thomson, 2014). He talks about how social agents experience change in fields where there is a disjunction between their habitus and the conditions within the fields. Fields are sites of struggle, and there is no ultimate winner.

The education transition field in Saudi Arabia is the space in which young people navigate and negotiate their post-secondary opportunities, and is made up of teachers, counsellors, parents, peers, college and university admissions officers, employers, and policymakers. Through the concept of 'field', a purely supply/demand-driven relationship in the labour market is challenged, and the influence of perceptions of stakeholders and

their interactions with one another are recognised. It is useful to explore the field in the context of decision-making as it sheds light on the competing actors, but it also situates the decision makers within a space where they are competing, where they have a role to play, and a role to fulfil. The thesis questions the influence of perceptions on decision-making as well as the role of social structures in making choices. Utilising the concept of field can allow for an understanding of the negotiations between the individual and the social pressures and pathways.

3.2.1.3 *Horizons for action*

Hodkinson et al. (1996) define horizons for action as a combination of externally located opportunities in the field, influenced by internal dispositions of habitus, or the “perceptions of what might be available and what might be appropriate” (p. 150). Where a social actor is situated within a field and the amount of ‘cultural capital’ he/she accumulates over time often defines the breadth of a person’s horizon (Hodkinson et al., 1996, p. 3). Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is a symbolic form of capital that is inherited and accumulated through interactions from an early age in the form of language, parental influence, and schooling, etc. (Reay, David and Ball, 2005, p. 20). When studies about pathways and trajectories focus on outcomes, they often neglect to probe the way in which underlying, inherited values and norms influence choice.

Cultural capital is derived from a socially and historically constructed common base of knowledge (culture), which affects one’s habitus and therefore impacts one’s opportunities, relationships, and influence within the ‘education transition field’ (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p. 36). Cultural capital also exists in an institutionalised form such as educational qualifications, so that school success is affected by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family rather than individual talent or achievement (Reay, 2004). Reay (2004) argues for a broad understanding of cultural capital that focuses on measurable perceptions that influence choice, such as confidence and entitlement. How young people perceive their options within the field, therefore, drives pragmatic decision-making within one’s horizon for action. Furthermore, even with

horizons for action, derived from the interaction between ‘opportunity structures’ (Roberts, 2009) and the dispositions that make up habitus, “whim, drift, and happenstance can exert powerful influences over aspiration-setting and decision-making” (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999, p. 101). The concept provides a set of theories that combine individual dispositions which are situated within a specific context. This framing can help us better understand the subjective perceptions of young people, and the influence of structures on their choices when analysing empirical data.

Bourdieu’s theory of habitus is often criticised for being overly deterministic, however, Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) stress that this is a misreading of the concept of habitus, one that fails to recognise that it is a reflexive feedback loop. Individual actions do indeed influence the way social interactions are experienced. One area where it may be difficult to operationalise, however, is in uncovering tacit knowledge. Walther *et al.* (2015) argue that understanding context allows for a deeper understanding of the tacit knowledge that individuals have. Shedding light on the context, and situating lived-experiences within the contextual setting is pertinent to understanding perceptions and their influence on choice. Agency is not only limited to the sense of control that an individual has (the way people say they feel is considered to be truth) (See Evans (2007) and Wyn and White (1998)). Removing the individual from his/her setting obscures underlying context from view and can give a false impression of increased agency. Being cognizant of such limitations is essential for designing an empirical study that can help reveal the components that formulate young Saudis’ dispositions and habitus.

While an increased focus on young people and decision-making in changing social settings continues to produce new findings (Brooks, 2009; Evans and Helve, 2013; Schoon and Silbereisen, 2009b; Schoon and Silbereisen, 2018), the *Careership* model provides a very thorough framework through which the interplay of agentic and structural variables and the associated power and influence of each can be qualitatively analysed and through which its relevance can be assessed. According to Hodkinson et al. (1996),

post-secondary choices are not just about rationally choosing one option over another, but choices are “a complex interaction between stakeholders, using widely different and unequally distributed resources [and] consist of negotiations, alliances, struggle, and conflict” (1996, p. 51).

3.2.2 Decision-making in TVET

TVET is often presented as an educational route that will provide useful skills for the labour market and improve employment prospects of young people, especially those who “lack the resources, skills or motivation to continue with higher education” (Zimmermann, 2012). The debates about transitions into vocational education in industrialised countries tends to focus on employment for those whose education decisions lay outside of linear pathways into university or work (Roberts, 2015; Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017). Strategies to increase employment opportunities through vocational education is often policy driven rather than reliant on empirical studies (Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017). In his discussion of ‘academic drift’, Raffe (2003) discusses the various ways policymakers consider different post-compulsory pathways by relating the outcomes selection to labour market outcomes. Academic routes, which are more difficult to access (especially for lower income students or those with disadvantages), are continuously packaged as the superior ones. Despite access challenges, the general trend of academic drift continues to frame vocational schools and apprenticeship programs as the less desirable option, regardless of the benefits that can be attributed to both. This lens leads to efforts to achieve ‘parity of esteem’ (Toit, 2004) and to a focus on raising the status of vocational education. However, within many vocational structures, those in vocational education fields traditionally tend to enter the labour force into lower paying positions, joining a pre-defined ‘working class’ that is ‘massified’ and juxtaposed against other status markers that hold greater status (Skeggs, 1997). The lower status of TVET can be viewed as a result of an awareness of this form

of labelling, where TVET carries symbols and connotations of a lower status and a stigma of low aspirations.

Chanquesliani, Relly and Laczik (2016) show how focusing on policies to level the esteem of vocational and academic, however, tends to perpetuate the deficits of TVET and its lower status rather than improving it. Instead, they recommend focusing on vocational excellence through practice rather than policy. As TVET continues to change and evolve, Guile and Unwin (2019) remind us not to lose sight of the purpose of TVET and its transformative potential within the workplace. Focusing on TVET practices as well as policy can help overcome the deficit model and re-focus the lens on the distinct features of TVET. However, it is also important to review TVET policies to better understand the way the pathway is framed and constructed, and the influence this has on participation.

3.2.2.1 *Links to the labour market*

Within industrialised countries, the linkages between TVET and the labour market tend to influence patterns of participation in TVET. Countries with strong TVET links to industry such as Austria and Germany (Eurostat, 2015) have traditionally embedded VET into secondary schools, with skills-based training that has very close links to specific employment destinations (Gessler, 2017). These “dual systems” tend to combine general education, vocational education and classroom training with apprenticeships (long term, on-the-job training). A higher percentage of students are enrolled in VET than in tertiary education. Countries with the highest GDP tend to be structured in this way, particularly in the European context where there are strong historical traditions of Guilds and trades (Laflamme, 1993). Another vocational pathway is a hybrid one, such as those in Norway, Finland and Australia (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2010; Pash, 2017; Zoellner, 2016). A hybrid pathway tends to offer vocational and general education to students in equal amounts and offer open transitions between vocational training and general/academic training at the tertiary level, allowing for more

flexible pathways to have equally strong VET and general education programs at the secondary level (See Deissinger *et al.*, 2013).

And finally, VET pathways with weaker links to the labour market are offered in the UK, USA (Bosch and Charest, 2010) and Japan (Miki *et al.*, 2015). VET in these countries tends to offer more vocational training at the post-secondary level. These countries tend to have more open competition in their labour markets, where firms are less regulated and have more freedom to set qualifications requirements for their employees. Discussions about the benefits of more flexible hybrid systems are more frequent in international policy, as they offer a mix of both general and vocational elements, so that the value of qualifications is high and relevant to the local industry, but flexible and convertible based on changing economic and individual circumstances, and includes all stakeholders in the process of developing and implementing the system (Polidano and Tabasso, 2014). However, embedded practices and historical structures of VET challenge restructuring efforts, highlighting the importance of recognising the contextual challenges rather than trying to find uniform approaches to implementing TVET (See Davey and Fuller, 2013).

As discussed in Section 2.9, Saudi Arabia has focused on expanding the TVET sector through the establishment of different governing bodies independent of the Ministry of Education and the private sector. The focus on expansion is motivated by a need for specific skills in the labour market. The policies tend to create a distinct pathway for TVET that is obviously different than academic education. With a lack of focus on best practices or excellence within the TVET sector, the Saudi approach to TVET appears to trap TVET in a deficit status. It is important to understand the way TVET is framed as a route distinct from an academic one in order to better understand the decisions and choices of young people in Saudi Arabia.

3.2.2.2 *TVET pathways*

Transition structures and pathways and their relationship to the employment sector influence the character and size of education pathways and differ depending on which is

viewed to have a better employment outcome. Therefore, aspirations tend to be heavily skewed in the direction of pathways that appear to offer a high 'return on investment'.

Hodgson and Spours (2013) note that policymakers can enhance opportunity structures through mediating pathways and improving factors that push young people into progression within the education system. Improving 'push factors' (i.e. the ones that support learning), such as curriculum, teaching quality and career guidance (Raffe, 2003) complements 'pull factors' (i.e. the ones that attract students to apply/enrol) such as increased access to routes toward further and higher education and apprenticeships. Raffe (2003) further reminds us that despite the influence of the labour market, "the labour market would not be the final court of appeal on the benefits of different pathways. Its criteria may conflict with other priorities such as social justice or inclusion" (Raffe, 2003, p. 8). As Raffe (2003) notes, labour market opportunities may strongly influence choice, but other factors cannot be ignored.

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2011) highlight the influence of social and institutional factors such as gender, training provider, institutional proximity and family influence on choice. While gender-blind pathways may be designed by policy-makers, gender norms may continue to govern choice and create invisible barriers. For instance, in the majority of countries around the world, young men are more likely to enrol in vocational education than young women (UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, 2015), despite equal opportunities being marketed to both. Women report a greater detachment in vocational settings in many contexts (See for instance Hegna, 2017). As an example of why this may be the case, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2011) note that school provisions of career education and guidance are most often introduced after young people begin their choice process, and decision-making often occurs without 'official' guidance, so that young people most likely base their choices on other sources of information. In light of the discussion on symbolic value and the influences of social networks (Granovetter, 1973), these other sources can be heavily influenced by social relationships and norms. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2011) note, however, that despite

identifying these factors, insights into *the way* they influence choice remains vague, highlighting the importance of additional micro-scale research.

Understanding the influence of pathway and opportunity structures are important to understanding patterns of participation. However, despite the weaknesses in opportunities along pathways into TVET, a neoliberal approach tends to play an influential role in the way policies are implemented. Rather than focus on the weak links to the labour market or strengthening push factors, many of the policies aimed at improving access focus on the individual choice-maker. Studies have shown, however, that aspirations are often high, and structural barriers tend to restrict educational achievement and access. Furthermore, the education framework, along with social, cultural and structural pressures can act to limit aspirations, pushing young people down specific pathways that are seemingly pre-determined (Reay, David and Ball, 2005).

The literature discussed in this chapter thus far was generated to better understand youth transitions in industrialised economies. It has been argued that individuals, while still in many ways bound by existing social structures and norms (Cuconato, 2017a; Evans, 2007; Evans and Helve, 2013), are also navigating through a post-modern landscape and must navigate more independently (Beck, 1994; Furlong, 2007; Giddens, 1991b). In today's global economy, young people compete for work and education regionally and globally and are required to learn throughout their lives in order to remain economically relevant (Keep, 2009). The Bourdieusian field in which young people negotiate their opportunities in industrialised states differs from those in transitional and developing economies, and therefore young people must negotiate with different players and rules. The next section will explore some of the differences between the context in the industrialised and developing world. It is important to highlight these differences for this study, as the empirical data will be collected in a context significantly different to that in which the theoretical concepts discussed here were generated.

3.3 TVET Decisions beyond industrialised economies

The social and economic landscape of the developing world, while diverse and varied is characterised by large youth populations and large income gaps between the rich and poor. In his discussion of the importance in investing in TVET, Gough (2010) argues that policymakers recommend TVET for developing nations in order to stimulate economic growth. The focus of education reform tends to be on upskilling for industrialisation and economic growth (McGrath, 2018) and a systematic transformation geared toward eventually achieving a knowledge economy (Al Ohali and Al Aqili, 2009), creating policies that are premised with the HCT narrative.

Developing countries often seek the support of international organisations in efforts to industrialise their economies. For instance, Chapter Two noted the early involvement of consultants in economic and institutional planning in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, coinciding with the adoption of a HCT approach in global international development organisations, where education was presented as a “productive investment with a high rate of return” (McGrath, 2018, p. 32). It appears then that it is no accident that the policy goals of education in Saudi Arabia are framed in the functional HCT terms, similar to many other parts of the developing world despite contextual differences.

Keep (2011) notes that emphasis on the knowledge economy highlights the importance of skills, and assumes that people will make rational choices that are in line with national strategies to achieve competitive skills, often ignoring structural barriers that push people into low paid jobs (Keep, 2011, p. 21). However, the skills policy rhetoric overlooks the limits to access, ignores variability in experiences, and pushes forward with an agenda to compete globally by building structures that will enable individuals to make the most rationally beneficial decisions. For the developing world, TVET offers a specific type of education that can equip youth with skills necessary to participate effectively in the formal economy that is often industry based and requires technical skills. This has led to a vocationalisation of curriculum in many parts of the developing world, with a focus on adjusting pathways to distribute opportunities more

evenly and increase participation in vocational settings rather than encourage young people to only aspire to academic education (Pavlova, Lee and Maclean, 2017).

The case of Saudi Arabia as a developing country differs from other contexts, as it is classified as a developing country but is also a high income economy (WEF, 2013). The World Economic Forum measures 12 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and notes that the region is one of the most disparate of those included in the 'human capital index', which measures multiple development factors and ranks countries in terms of their economic and social status (WEF, 2015). Within the region, Saudi Arabia's GDP per capita is fivefold higher than Egypt's, but the two countries are ranked at a comparable level, "highlighting that economic performance alone is an inadequate measure of countries' ability to successfully leverage their human capital endowment" (WEF, 2015, p. 20). According to Hertog (2010), Gulf state governments have access to much greater resources than other developing countries, but poor resource management has led to factors such as gender gaps in school participation, youth unemployment and low female labour participation as well as economic inefficiencies. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reform strategy and its associated National Transformation Program (NTP) outline economic, social and structural plans that aim to diversify the economy, reduce the country's dependence on oil and foreign labour, and provide new opportunities for investment and social progress (CEDA, 2016). The NTP dedicates a strategic objective and several key performance indicators to TVET: "Raising Saudis' skill levels to match labour market needs," stemming from the vision to provide citizens with "knowledge and skills to meet the future needs of the labour market".

3.3.1 Social and cultural influences

In addition to the institutional features of the developing world and the role of international organisations in facilitating VET provision, social structures and arrangements differ significantly in developing countries from those in industrialised economies. Cultural

norms and ideologies tend to supersede legislation. In a discussion of educated women in Iran, Mehdizadeh and Scott (2011) note that although there is no official law barring women from equal economic participation to men, unemployment rates for women in Iran are much higher than for men, and that women are employed in limited sectors such as education and healthcare, “traditional cultural patterns and powerful structures rooted in patriarchy also cut women off from the possibility of varying their fields of economic participation” (Mehdizadeh and Scott, 2011, p. 151). While the patriarchal and Islamic discourses in Iran are viewed as deeply embedded structural barriers to women’s participation, studies have shown that other factors often allow for participation, such as state support for childcare and increased work based learning opportunities (Mehdizadeh and Scott, 2011, p. 159).

However, the absence of laws in similar contexts tends to restrict choice. Women still face widespread barriers, entrenched in laws that keep them out of jobs and prevent them from owning a business. The World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law report finds that “104 economies prevent women from working in certain jobs...and in 18 economies, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working” (UN Women, 2018). As one of these economies, and despite efforts to overcome prevailing barriers, Saudi Arabia’s working conditions make it very difficult for some women to work, as culturally established norms of mixing genders and public/private spaces are pervasive. The legislative push to increase women’s participation, discussed in chapter two, led to the creation of physical work-arounds such as separate office space, entrances and corridors, yet as McGrath (2018) notes, work can either facilitate or block the achievement of capabilities due to its availability or absence, but globally women are less likely to access work in the formal economy.

As a Muslim society governed by Sharia Law, religious justifications are often cited by religious clerics to govern social activities. The nature of religious teachings and guidance in Saudi Arabia are subject to interpretation and implementation, but often go unquestioned due to the sensitive nature of religious teachings (Vassiliev, 2000).

Women and their interactions in public spaces is one social space that remains hotly debated within Saudi Arabia. Mernissi (1987) argues that family structures in traditional Islamic culture are male-dominated, and that a movement away from this is condemned and rejected as Western influence. She notes that feminists view public and private space as institutionally separate within contemporary market-based societies. She further argues that the institutionalised spacial boundaries give power to men at the expense of women, and that “any transgression of the boundaries is a danger to the social order because it is an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power” (p. 137). As Mernissi points out, whenever cooperation between men and women is inevitable, or unavoidable, then an array of mechanisms are put in place, such as the veil or in the case of Saudi Arabia, separate entrances, rest areas, and workspaces, to prevent too great an intimacy from arising. While this may appear to be obviously restrictive and oppressive in a Western context, the seclusion of women is often described by women in Muslim societies as prestigious, in contrast to the Western perception of seclusion (Mernissi, 1987).

Despite efforts to hold on to traditionally patriarchal traditions, multidimensional change, fuelled by changing global relations and shifting economic needs in Saudi Arabia, is changing both the way women are perceived and the access they have to spaces and opportunities that may not have been available without global shifts in work and opportunity. Mernissi (1987) argues however that these changes are not systematic and tend to be rejected because of how closely they emulate Western arrangements. The demographic changes in Saudi Arabia today, however, which were discussed in Chapter One show that the youth bulge has led to more systematic and legislative planning to move women into legitimate public spaces that they were unwelcome into in the past, and that show a deliberate plan to legitimise their economic and social participation. The challenges will be the difficulties women face with their families as social institutions catch up with newer ideologies enforced by legislation (Barne and Wadhwa, 2018) .

The absence of social control alone also does not directly translate into freedom to choose. In her discussion of women's perceptions of freedom and choice, Mahmood (2001) believes that freedom (of choice) cannot be essentialised or assumed as the absence of social control and a manifestation of one's true desires. In her discussion of Mahmood, Franceschelli (2016) reminds us that freedom results from employing controlled behaviours to construct one's self. Mahmood (2001) contends that a label of 'oppression' due to compliance with norms is unfair as it denies that women are agentic and ignores their deliberate actions that help them define their own identity. The emphasis on agency therefore minimises the role of social conditions where lives unfold. However, Franceschelli (2016) argues that the emphasis on agency is a response to the social contexts where perceptions of oppression originate and must be understood as a situated understanding.

A 2014 UNDP (Hardgrove *et al.*, 2014) report stresses that young people in the developing world are more vulnerable, and are often viewed as risky individuals. Moreover, despite global efforts to increase education for young people in low income countries, especially the most marginalised, many cannot access education at all. Therefore, in a climate of economic reform, and while Saudi labour market policies continue to shift and develop to become more inclusive of women and more attractive to Saudi men in sectors that were previously dominated by foreign workers, it is important that empirical research be conducted to explore how norms, discourse and policies influence action in the labour market, and to what extent structural institutions limit or facilitate individual agency.

These concepts can help unpack the experiences of young people, and highlight ways that choice and agency are understood. Social context influences the habitus of young people in Saudi Arabia, and it is therefore necessary to explore the different understandings of social roles and positions to understand how agency is expressed and the degree to which it is possible to exert agency within the existing structural contexts.

3.3.2 Conclusions: Implications for empirical research

The aim of this chapter was to explore how the interplay of choice, opportunity, and limitations in the post-secondary landscape are conceptualised in existing literature, and contemplated ways that that could be useful for the understanding of the experience of Saudi youth.

In the introduction to this chapter, I noted the observable tensions between policymakers and educational professionals within schools. Students caught in the middle of these tensions will inevitably be faced with uncertainty and at times contradicting forces. This chapter has shown that while many factors influence decision-making, the mechanism of influence and the degree of control over these factors is variable and shifting. To understand the interplay of structures and personal agency, I highlighted ways in which structure plays out in different contexts and how this can enhance our understanding of this process in Saudi Arabia. Embedded and often invisible, social norms permeate into legislation and practice. Do these frame the horizons for action within which decisions about education and careers are made in Saudi Arabia? Do they limit choices or expand them? Are these norms in conflict with TVET? The lens of pragmatic decision making will allow for a deeper exploration of what is pragmatic in the context of Saudi Arabia. It will also take into account the ways in which aspirations are formed and the influence of social networks, symbolic value, gender and opportunities in the labour market.

The concepts of pragmatic decision-making and horizons for action provide a broad structure through which young people in Saudi Arabia's choices and aspirations can be evaluated. They provide lenses to examine the influence of structure on opportunities, uncover potential limits within the context of Saudi Arabia, as well as enable young people to articulate ways in which they are participating in their career decisions. The framework allows for probing meanings attached to different educational routes. Based on what we know about the Saudi context and the education system, assumptions are made about how TVET is understood, experienced and valued.

Concepts of pragmatic choices and horizons for action will allow us to explore these assumptions in more depth. Sentiments about TVET are more than just cognitive ones, they are embodied, involving both practical and discursive consciousness. They are based on partial information usually from trusted people, and they involve several people. They are not irrational choices, so they do not contradict the idea that individuals make choices that benefit them, but they are not purely *technically* rational because they are 'bound' by the social norms that govern how youth define what may be beneficial choices. These concepts constitute the framework through which empirical data will be collected and analysed.

Before settling on using *careership* as a conceptual framework, I explored different approaches to better understand young people's experiences of educational transitions. I was initially interested in studying ways to minimize disruptions to transition patterns by finding more efficient ways to equip young people with the skills needed for the workplace, more or less examining transitions through an HCT lens. Through reading more youth transition literature, however, I was not convinced that HCT sufficiently took into the consideration the social barriers to access, and wanted to get deeper insight into the availability of opportunities. This led me to contemplate a development lens. However, the economic and political structure of Saudi Arabia was very different from many developing states, and I was concerned that this could lead to overly prescriptive findings. The lack of previous research warranted using a more general framework that allowed me to draw a more illustrative picture of opportunities and shortcomings as understood by young people. I wanted to avoid policy research due to the rapidly changing nature of policy within the country, and instead better understand the social fabric that policy targets. Once this baseline of social data related to education decision-making was developed, more could be revealed about imbalances of social justice and inefficiencies in education provision and skills development. The lack of previous research on education decision-making also led me to discount utilising the Life Course theory (Elder and Giele, 1998), as I was not able to find data related to in the

short history of educational opportunities in the country. Furthermore, the widening participation literature (See Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003; Chowdry *et al.*, 2013; Heath, Fuller and Paton, 2007) while interesting, was advocating for the need to widen participation for the disadvantaged, a group that was not sufficiently identified in the existing literature. Finally, I also found the socio-ecological work on agency and aspirations relevant and fascinating, but preferred a constructivist lens that allowed for the incorporation of young people's voices (Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017; Schoon and Silbereisen, 2018). I therefore chose a framework that would allow to look at both individual identities as well as collective ones, and how the interaction between the two formed aspirations and actions to serve as a baseline from which those other lenses could be utilised in the future in both small and larger scale studies.

As a middle level theory, *Careership*, provides a framework that is easily operation-able in an empirical setting. It allows for a theoretical breakdown of different experiences for a deeper exploration of how aspirations are formed, how we can investigate if and where agency is expressed, and what structural influences persist. The tools presented in this chapter – that of pragmatic decision-making within horizons for action, in combination with other theoretical concepts such as opportunity structures, bounded agency and different gender narratives can allow us to investigate empirical data about the school-to-work decision-making process of young Saudis. The concept of horizons for action, for instance, helps incorporate ideas of persisting cultural views of some jobs and how these influence the education choices of young Saudis, regardless of financial opportunity. Furthermore, horizons differ from one person to another because they do not include every career or possible opportunity, instead, they are related to a combination of individual and structural barriers, such as exam results, geographic constraints, socio-economic pressures as well as ethnic, class and gender sub-cultures (Reay *et al.*, 2005, p. 92). The framework provides tools that will take a diverse range of opinions and backgrounds into account. The ways in which these cultural norms impact horizons for action can be further examined through this framework. In the next chapter,

a methodological design to investigate youth transitions empirically through these concepts is presented in more depth.

Chapter 4. **Research design and methodology**

In Chapter Three, I presented a conceptual framework that drew on theories of youth transitions. This framing has underpinned the development of a qualitative research design and methodology that guided my data collection to inform my research questions. To gain a better understanding of young people's subjective understandings of their lived experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 24), the research questions warrant an interpretive approach. Drawing on the work of Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996), and in light of the historical and social context in which young people in Saudi Arabia make decisions, I examined how young people envisioned their careers from three angles; the social context, the education and employment fields, and the individual experience.

This chapter will describe the details of the research strategies adopted in this study. The data collection was conducted in two waves, with focus groups between October and December 2016, and interviews between February and March 2017. Overall, 16 focus groups and 18 individual interviews were conducted with a total of 152 participants. This chapter will be organised in four main sections. The first section will describe the motivations for the constructivist approach. The second section will describe the research design and the way in which contextual challenges such as access and cultural norms were circumvented. It will also reflect on the ethical implications of the research, and my relationship to the data and the process as a researcher. The third section will describe the research methods including a description of the sample and the data types and collection methods. Finally, the fourth section will describe the strategies used to analyse the interview and focus group data.

4.1 The Methodological Approach

In my introduction, I established that the aim of this research was to understand the rationale behind young Saudis' limited uptake of vocational education despite the increased policy focus and the seemingly large investments in TVET expansion. I argued that despite these investments, youth tend to overlook TVET, opting either for more

academic educational routes and qualifications or choosing to enter the labour market directly out of secondary school. As empirical research conducted in Saudi Arabia regarding attitudes to and perceptions of TVET are mostly quantitative (Al Andas, 2002; Al Asmari, 2001; Al Ghamdi, 1994; Hammad, 1973; Murtada, 1996; Shukri, 1972) they illustrate these trends, but fail to explain the motivations behind them with clarity and detail, thus leading to my focus on exploring youth perceptions, attitudes and experiences. In order to generate rich data to investigate these perceptions, my research uses a constructivist methodology.

In his discussion of the *Foundations of Social Research*, Crotty (2012) describes the epistemological underpinnings of an interpretive constructivist approach as one concerned with the unique experiences people have within the social world (Crotty, 2012, p. 58). Constructivists do not believe that there is one picture of a social world, instead knowledge is an adaptive and discursive function (Fosnot, 2005). Any given phenomenon does not exist independently, but is built, and 'constructed' through action and social interaction. Symbolic interactionists, for instance, remind us that 'significant symbols' are attached to actions and are communicated through different social mediums (such as language) influencing our individual understandings. Certain actions symbolise differences in class, for instance, and are recognised through specific manifestations of this class (Skeggs, 1997). This can be seen in the use of language and in choices of leisure, for instance.

This thesis believes that a gap in understanding Saudi youth transitions into post-secondary education and employment is in large part due to taken for granted assumptions about the impact of identity, attitude and the experiences of young Saudis (Al Andas, 2002, pp. 60-61). A constructivist approach allowed for a data generation process that inquired into the agentic motivations of young people within their social settings. It allowed for the collection of rich data resting on "a subjectivist, interactionist, socially constructed ontology and on an epistemology that recognised multiple realities, agentic behaviours and the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of

the participants” (Cohen, 2013, p. 116). This helped uncover much of the ‘taken-for-granted knowledge’ (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982) that is embedded in policy documents and existing literature related to the topic.

The theoretical framework adopted to design the research acknowledges the importance of understanding the way meanings are constructed by both the individual and the individual’s interactions in the social world. The methodology is informed by this framework and intends to generate data that can be interpreted using the same epistemological and ontological assumptions. The framework is founded on the Careership theory, developed by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), which looks at data interpretively using a hermeneutical approach. Their methodology was rooted at the beginning in symbolic interactionism and phenomenology “with assumptions that the perceptions, actions and interactions of stakeholders would determine the meaning of [the research subject]” (Hodkinson, 1998, p. 561). The research from which the Careership theory was generated drew heavily on Bourdieu and Giddens as those theorists shared concerns about structure/agency and objectivity/subjectivity (Hodkinson, 1998, p. 561). As Giddens notes, while the positivist objective approach is insufficient to understanding the social world, the same can be said of a completely subjective view (Giddens and Dallmayr, 1982), and offers the theory of structuration, in which neither human agents nor society have ‘primacy’ and social practices are produced and reproduced across time and space (Giddens and Dallmayr, 1982, p. 8).

My epistemological stance remains a constructivist one since the answers and information shared by the respondents constructed what was discovered by the researchers; the findings are both constructed by the respondents but also “objectively discovered by the researchers” (Hodkinson, 1998, p. 562). Drawing on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, and the concept of the hermeneutic circle (the constant discursive relationship between researcher and researched), Hodkinson describes the researcher’s interpretation of meaning to be discursive and influenced by his/her cultural and historical dispositions (or his/her habitus, to use Bourdieu’s term). As we examine

the individual experiences and perceptions, we also understand the context in which the meaning is embedded. By moving back and forth between these parts and the whole in which they exist discursively, interpretation helps us understand meaning. A constructivist approach calls for a close relationship between researcher and respondent, and rests on an epistemological belief that “reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 36).

The next section describes how these assumptions influenced the research design and empirical data collection methods in my study.

4.2 Research Setting and Design

As Saudi Arabia is a geographically large country, (see Chapter One), it was not possible to include students from all regions or all TVET institutes due to time and resource limitations. I focused my research in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia due to the practicality of the location as it is my region of origin and where I have connections and can access information more easily. Additionally, the Eastern Province shares proximal borders to the Arabian Gulf and all other GCC countries²⁷, making it a desirable education and employment destination for students from other parts of the country. It is the largest province in the country, and the centre of oil production and an industry hub. Many Saudis from around the country are there for work, it has a large foreign presence due to a concentration of multinationals, and is home to a large Shia population²⁸. For these reasons, its population is diverse and therefore provided a mix of social background indicators during the data collection process. These characteristics are

²⁷GCC refers to the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which include the United Arab Emirates, the State of Bahrain, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar and the State of Kuwait (GCC, 2019).

²⁸ While no official statistics are available on the percentage of Shia, it is assumed that they make up around 10-15% of the Saudi population and anywhere between 20-40% of the Eastern Province.

useful as access to students from a variety of backgrounds can provide insight to how the different socio-cultural beliefs that make up individuals' habitus contribute to their career decisions. In this way, the region provides a sample that may encompass the experiences of the wider youth population across Saudi Arabia, since it can be argued that tribal traditions persist within families regardless of geographic location. Larger cities in Saudi Arabia tend to be diverse and rural populations are dying out (See Section 1.2) , and while the social makeup of the region may distinguish it from other parts of the country, I argue that a study in a major city provides an opportunity to learn about how different aspects of one's background and origin influence how they perceive and access different opportunities, and these perceptions may be similar to social positions and affiliations regardless of their current geographic location.

The conservative social structure in Saudi Arabia posed some data collection limitations. Respondents needed to be interviewed in gender-homogenous settings. An additional concern was that young Saudis between the ages of 17-20 may be shy, and reluctant to share their views openly and honestly with a female researcher. In my discussions with a career counsellor in a technical school in Dammam as well as a veteran focus group researcher, both recommended that I hire male research assistants to conduct the face to face research with the male students. I hired two male research assistants, who attended two focus groups alongside me in one of the private institutes. I prepared detailed guidelines on the research purpose as well as the methods to conduct a focus group. A signed confidentiality agreement with the research assistants is kept on file (See Appendix 21 for a copy of the training material prepared for the research assistants).

The chosen theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Three has determined that the design of the research should investigate individual identity, the education field, and changes over time to answer the research questions that were introduced in Chapter One:

1. How do young people’s perceptions of career opportunities influence their career aspirations and choices in relation to TVET?
2. How do structural institutions influence young people’s decisions related to TVET?

The theoretical framework assumes that individual actions, context and change over time can be isolated for the sake of analysis and interpretive purposes, but that the intersection of these three components drive a pragmatic form of decision-making. Therefore, the decision-making will be examined at the individual and social levels, as outlined in Table 4-1.

Levels of Inquiry	Individual and societal
Sites of Inquiry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secondary schools 2. Post-secondary training institutes 3. Online
Sources of Inquiry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 15/16 year old students in 10th grade 2. 17-26 year old students in their second and/or third-year of TVET 3. Male and female students
Methods of Inquiry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus Groups including activities 2. Computer-mediated in-depth interviews 3. Pro-formas

Table 4-1 Levels of Research Inquiry

Table 4-1 shows that individual and societal perceptions were explored by engaging with young people at different transition points in their education careers to gain a better understanding of agentic behaviour within the limits of education and employment transition field. The sites and sources of inquiry allowed me to explore the experience of secondary students and their understandings of future opportunities which could help make sense of the sentiments of students who were enrolled in VET and how aspirations are developed and the way they evolve over time, helping to answer my first research question.

Choosing to conduct online interviews was pragmatic on multiple fronts, as it allowed me to continue research from the UK, overcome a gender barrier and engage with young people in a site that they are comfortable in (See Sections 2.4 and 2.6). The sites of research were male TVET institutes, female TVET institutes, male secondary schools, female secondary schools and WhatsApp. The focus was on the individual

perceptions of young people, which I believe to be absent from the existing available literature, and therefore only students were interviewed for this research. I did not include interviews with parents, teachers and policy makers, as the experience of young people and their perceptions of how they are viewed is of interest to this study.

The methods of inquiry were meant to operate on two levels: focus groups were intended to provide broad collective understandings of the experience of education and career transitions, and the TVET experience (to be discussed in more depth in Sections 4.3.6-4.3.8). The individual interviews were intended to probe these experiences in greater depth and examine to what extent the broad definitions and understandings of social phenomena resonated with select individuals. This in turn would allow for a deeper understanding of the way social institutions influence individual actions and choices and help answer my second research question. It was also necessary to get a sense of the diversity of the sample through a more descriptive overview of the research participants. To gain a clear picture of geographic origins and socio-economic status as related to the individual process and experience, and to enable the development of a richer analysis of the interview data. To accommodate these needs a short bio-data proforma was used for all participants (See Appendix 14).

The following section will describe the data sample, methods of data collection and data management.

4.3 Data collection and management

Access to the sites and sources of inquiry was through official channels within the Saudi MOE office in the Eastern Province as well as the TVTC. I submitted official forms, available through their research offices and supplied them with my research plan (See Appendix 5). Once I received official documentary approval (See Appendices 6 and 8), I drew on my existing contacts, who included career counsellors, administrators as well as board members within the training institutes to gain admission to my identified research sites. Each site was given clear guidelines related to the profile of desired

participants, informed consent, eligibility criteria, and the number of students required for the data collection methods so they may delegate the recruitment process to someone who knows the student profile. Parental consent was deemed unnecessary for the college participants, and passive consent forms were sent to the secondary students' parents (See Appendix 12). Each participating institute also signed a consent form and confidentiality agreement.

4.3.1 Field questions

The field questions for the focus group and interview guides were developed to be as general as possible and to remove my own subjectivities from them as best as possible. To accomplish this, I made two versions of the questions, one that included my own understandings and examples, and a second set of questions that tried to remove leading statements and achieve. The order of questions was intended to move from general to more specific (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Tables 4-2 and 4-3 shows the initial process of developing field questions that would enable me to answer the broader research questions, as they are framed by the research questions, and linked to the theoretical framework.

Framework		Questions I would like to ask	Focus group questions (not in order they will be asked)
Identity (habitus)	Personal experiences	What kinds of social activities were common in your high school?	What kinds of things do you do with your friends? Probing opportunity: have they changed since enrolling in college? Have the things that you do changed?
		What have your friends gone on to do?	
	Geography	What kinds of experiences are common in your city/town? What are typical activities you engage in?	
	Experiences within the field	Can you describe conversations/interactions you had with your family when making a decision to come to this college? Have you had any experiences that made you question/doubt your family's recommendations/your choice?	Can you describe your relationships inside the college? Do you engage in any activities?
		Is there something particular about the way you dress or the way you wear your hair that you feel helped or hindered your decision?	
		Have you had an experience where your family or someone at school expressed their expectations for you after secondary school?	
		Have you considered your family's opinions and concerns?	Do you ever feel pressure to behave in a certain way? Probing opportunity: by who? How does this make you feel?
Neighbourhood	Tell me about your experience with others in secondary school?		
Field/ horizon for action	Attainment/ educational background Expectations		
	Turning points	Have you experienced something that has made you change your decision? Your action? (if yes, how did you react/how did it make you feel?)	Have things worked out the way you expected so far? Have you been faced with any obstacles?
habitus	Preferences/ aspirations	What do you aspire to do with your qualification? (Is it a job, own business, money, marriage, etc?) Do you think this is likely?	What do you aspire to do with your degree? Probing opportunity: have you considered marriage, job, starting your own company?

Table 4-2 Generating field questions RQ1

Framework		Questions I would like to ask	Focus group questions (not in order they will be asked)
Context-related (community)	Family background	Are expectations about careers been shaped by your family's experience with education and jobs?	In your opinion how does one's background influence their decision?
	Culture	Do family histories influence the type of careers people pursue? What has been your experience with this?	Probing opportunity: family income, rural or urban upbringing, strong tribal ties, gender
		What is the general opinion about TVET in your community?	How do people in your family view TVET? In your community?
Opportunities (horizons for action)	Networks	In your experience, have you been 'labelled' or put into a category or social group by your family or someone at school?	Have you or someone you know had an experience with a wasta?
		How has that influenced your career path?	
		From your experience, does your family's income influence your choices and opportunities? In what ways?	
		Do you or your family consider wasta ² when thinking about your future job? (has this been influential?)	
		Did someone accompany you through the application process?	
	Labour market	When considering TVET as an option, was it a choice between a job, or education? Or did you look at a specific specialisation?	Tell me about why you are enrolled in your current specialisation? Probing opportunity: did you have other choices?
		What role did the TVET specialisation play in making your decision? And was the specialisation a choice you made?	What do you like or dislike about it?
		What other opportunities did you contemplate?	
		What kinds of discussions did you have about how your certification would be used later?	What kinds of job opportunities are there for someone in your field?
	Were you presented with alternative opportunities? Did anyone contribute to your final choice?		
Geography	What kinds of education and work opportunities are available in (your city)?		
Gender	Do you think that being a (male/female) affected the decision you made to come to this college?		

Table 4-3 Generating field questions RQ2

4.3.2 Pilot Study

Once the sites of inquiry and the target sample were identified, a pilot study was designed to test the research field questions, pro-formas and the activity tools and assess the feasibility of access and willingness of young people to participate. The process followed included the following:

1. Conduct an all-female focus group to evaluate:
 - a. Setting
 - b. Themes and questions
 - c. Access
 - d. Willingness to share
2. Explore the implications of using a research assistant to replicate similar results in an all-male focus group.
3. Conduct an interview using WhatsApp with participants from the focus groups in order to explore the approach in relation to ease of use, responsiveness, respondents' commitment, and preference of style.

Alternative data collection methods such as discarding the online method and focusing on face to face interviews with respondents who were willing to meet with a female researcher, or including family members in face to face interviews, were considered if the pilot proved any of the methods to be difficult.

After preliminary analysis of the data collected during the pilot study, I concluded that the interview schedule generated data that was useful for answering my research questions. Additional follow-up questions were identified that would help generate empirical evidence to support claims that do not fall into the theoretical framework of 'careership', and the pro-forma questions were revised to be more reflective of the sample's experiences. One example was related to the highest level of education of mother and father. The multiple-choice selections began with 'secondary' school. However, it became apparent that many of the students' parents did not read and write at all.

Overall, the pilot study produced rich data, and the stories the participants shared were powerful. I felt that the participants were eager to share frustrations that were not often solicited or rarely acknowledged. The focus groups seemed to give an empowering feeling to the respondents. One indication of this was their willingness to participate in a follow up one-on-one interview, as the majority of participants responded positively to this question on the pro-forma that was distributed at the end of the focus groups.

The WhatsApp interview format was also very helpful, as I found students happy to discuss more personal aspects of their social experiences related to educational and career transitions. It helped overcome any gendered discomforts as well, as one male student believed it was 'the only suitable way to have a discussion'. Conducting the pilot was an empowering phase of the research, as it helped develop better tools and implement the research design more effectively.

4.3.3 Research Participants

The different standings of public and private technical and vocational schools and the frequently shifting policies in Saudi Arabia translated into a diversity of experiences from respondents. Different kinds of institutes were selected in an aim to capture the variations in experiences in different settings, including gender, availability of specialisations/colleges based on gender, the size and esteem of the different colleges, the length of the certification programs, geographical location, fee structures, and prospects for future employment.

At the end of data collection, the sample had consisted of a total of 152 students, interviewed across 18 focus groups and 16 individual interviews. 149 of these students were from the focus groups (See Table 4-4), and 13 of the 16 interviewees were recruited from this sample. Three additional interviewees were recruited through a snowball method and online (See Table 4-5 for interview participants). Additionally, we collected 103 (from 56 young women and 47 young men) career preference worksheets and 137

bio-data pro-formas from the interviews and focus groups that served as an additional source of data to collect basic background information (e.g. age, location, etc).

Date	Facilitator	Type	Sex	# students	Age range	Location
24/10/2016	Hanaa	Secondary- Private general	F	9	14-16	Hassa
25/10/2016	Hanaa	Secondary - Private general	F	8	14-15	Dhahran
25/10/2016	Hanaa	Secondary - General	F	10	15-16	Dhahran
25/12/2016	Hanaa	Secondary - General	F	8	15-16	Saihat
26/12/2016	Hanaa	Secondary - General	F	6	16-17	Dammam
25/10/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - Private general	M	8	15-16	Dhahran
07/11/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - General	M	8	16-17	Dammam
28/11/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - General	M	10	15-17	AlKhobar
30/11/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - General	M	8	16-18	AlKhobar
14/12/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - General	M	8	15-16	Qatif
22/11/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - Technical	M	10	17-19	Dammam
13/12/2016	Research assistants	Secondary - Technical	M	13	16-22	Hassa
19/07/2016	Hanaa	Tertiary - Semi-governmental Polytechnic	M	7	20-24	Dammam
19/07/2016	Hanaa	Tertiary - Semi-governmental Polytechnic	M	5	21-24	Dammam
26/10/2016	Hanaa	Tertiary - Private	M	8	21-34	Dammam
14/12/2016	Research assistants	Tertiary - CoT	M	8	19-22	Qatif
20/12/2016	Research assistants	Tertiary - CoT	M	7	19-23	Dammam
27/12/2016	Hanaa	Tertiary - CoT	F	8	24-28	Hassa
Total secondary schools	12	Total Male	12	Total number of students interviewed in focus groups		149
Total tertiary institutes	6	Total Female	6			

Table 4-4 Focus Group details

Date	Type of Institute	Name	Gender	Recruitment
14/03/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Sameera	F	FG
28/02/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Arwa	F	FG
16/03/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Bushra	F	Snowball
21/03/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Jawaher	F	Snowball
03/13/2017	Tertiary - CoE	Dania	F	Online
05/03/2017	Secondary - general	Reham	F	FG
28/02/2017	Secondary - general	Zaina	F	FG
19/03/2017	Secondary - private general	Hanan	F	FG
14/03/2017	Secondary - general	Sulafa	F	FG
16/03/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Bader	M	FG
20/03/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Rami	M	FG
14/03/2017	Tertiary - CoT	Thamer	M	FG
28/02/1017	Tertiary - CoT	Adel	M	FG
14/03/2017	Secondary - general	Yousef	M	FG
10/03/2017	Secondary - vocational	Hatem	M	FG
28/02/2017	Secondary - general	Bassam	M	FG

Table 4-5 WhatsApp interview details

4.3.3.1 Profile of schools

My research assistants visited five male general secondary schools (one private and four public), two secondary industrial institutes, and two COTs:

One secondary industrial institute was located in Al Ahsa, considered a more rural city, which is one of the oldest agricultural cities in the Middle East and one of the first settled and inhabited locations in the country. There was also a general secondary school in Al Qatif, two secondary schools were inner city schools in the city of Al Khobar, and one was located on the outskirts of the main city of Dammam. One of the inner city school focus groups was predominantly composed of expatriate children, and was mostly excluded from the overall analysis, as the experience of young Saudis is arguably different from that of expatriates, and therefore their perception and knowledge of opportunities is very different than the majority of respondents in my sample. The inner-city Al Khobar schools were located in a very poor area of the city, and the majority of students from this focus group were from low income backgrounds: their parents had only basic primary or secondary education, and their fathers mostly worked in military positions.

One of the COTs was in Dammam, the major port city of the Eastern Province and the other was located in Al Qatif, a predominantly Shia neighbourhood. There was also a private vocational college where I personally conducted the focus group, in addition to the two pilot focus groups.

I visited five secondary girls' schools: three public ones and two private ones. The schools were in different parts of the Eastern Province, in an effort to capture a wide range of opinions. One of the schools was an inner city secondary in a very old part of the city of Dammam, where students typically came from low income backgrounds and depended heavily on government subsidies for healthcare and education, as well as housing. Two of the schools were located in what are typically considered suburbs of the main cities, in which residents typically live in standalone homes and have access to healthcare and education that is provided by their companies, but also have access to government services. One of these schools is located in a predominantly Shia suburb and therefore the students would typically belong to the largest religious minority group in the country. Of the two private schools, one is located in an affluent suburb of Dammam where half of the places in every year are reserved for children of Aramco employees, and the other 50% is typically very wealthy as the fees are considered to be very high. The school has an international track in addition to the national track (Dhahran Ahliyya Schools, 2018). All of the students in that focus group were enrolled in the Saudi national school system. The other private school is located in Al Ahsa, with a mix of Saudi and non-Saudi, from mostly affluent families. I also visited the only public women's vocational college (COT) in the Eastern Province, located in the smaller city of Al Ahsa.

4.3.3.1 *Profile of students*

The diversity of the sample represented gender, city of origin, socioeconomic status, attainment, and religious affiliation. Overall, the bio-data questionnaires showed that the majority of students' parents were either educated to tertiary school or secondary school at least, with 20 percent reporting their father were educated to general secondary and 20 percent reporting that their fathers held Bachelor degrees. 26 percent of the students

reported that their mothers were educated to secondary level, and 20 percent reported that their mothers were educated to diploma level. On the questionnaires, 6 percent of the students reported that their fathers could not read or write, and 3 percent reported that their mothers could not read or write. Some reported that their parents had very basic literacy skills, and only 9 percent of the students reported that their fathers and 9 percent of their mothers held graduate certifications. 41 percent of the students reported that their fathers worked for the government in military, administration or education, and the majority, slightly over 64 percent, reported that their mothers were homemakers. 17 percent reported that their mothers worked in public education. Only 12 of the students (9 percent) reported that their fathers held middle level diplomas, most probably from a technical college. These data points tended to vary according to location and type of school, where the inner-city school and public school in the suburbs had lower levels of education, and the private school students' parents had higher levels of education. The highest number of working mothers was in the predominantly Shia neighbourhood. For an overview of the biodata results, see Appendix 22.

This section provided an overview of the research sample and their main characteristics. The next section will discuss the data collection approaches and the rationale for selecting them.

4.3.4 Data collection methods

Qualitative social research with young people combines many ethical and logistical challenges with the complexity of social research design and inquiry. The nature of qualitative research often requires intimate inquiry into the experiences and the social relationships that influence feelings, actions and dispositions. Conducting such research with young people presents researchers with a variety of challenges that are unique to a cohort that by its nature is in a transitional state, is still developing opinions, and is impressionable and often distrusting of those in authoritative positions. With this in mind, two main data collection methods were chosen: focus groups and in-depth synchronous

one-to-one computer mediated communication (CMC), utilizing the social media application WhatsApp. Heath (2009) states that qualitative interviewing is the most common method used when researching young people and discusses ways to apply semi-structured interviews and focus groups with young people.

My research design combines focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. The focus groups were designed to get an overall understanding of the way young people view TVET and educational transitions. The interviews were intended to remove students from a setting where they discussed issues related to post-secondary education and work options amongst their peers and give them space to discuss their personal experiences and the influences of social and institutional structures (See Sections 4.3.7 and 4.3.8).

I scheduled the focus groups with the women's college and secondary schools through e-mailing the person responsible in the administration. I shared the consent forms I had from the MOE and TVTC and the approach letter that specified the number of students, and necessary time and space for the focus groups. These were recorded using my phone, and then uploaded to OneDrive. For the young men, my research assistant did the same. He personally visited some of the schools that were not responsive and scheduled the focus groups in that way. He would then upload the recording to OneDrive and share the pro-formas and activity sheets in specified folders. He would also share an overview of the process, the feel in the school and impressions of some of the participants.

4.3.5 Data management plan

Having multiple researchers, and data collected outside the UK involving young people, I developed a data management plan that I shared with my research assistants. For related ethical considerations, see Section 4.3.10.

Data Description		
Type of Information	1. Focus group recordings 2. Focus group transcripts 3. Individual interview transcripts	
Methods of capture	1. Focus groups 2. Computer mediated interviews using WhatsApp 3. Biographical data questionnaire 4. Face to face interviews with key informants	
Amount of data	• 7-10 focus groups (6-8 participants each) • 7-12 individual interviews • Up to 100 questionnaires	
Data Lifecycle		
Data capture	July-December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Group recordings WhatsApp interviews Questionnaires
Data storage	July 2016-2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encrypted using BitLocker and uploaded to OneDrive for Business
Data transcription	Nov, 2016-June, 2017	Voice Record Pro software for Iphone offers a slow playback speed and transcripts will be saved as Word documents
Data cleansing	Nov, 2016-June, 2017	Anonymise data and assign aliases
Data analysis	Nov, 2016-Dec, 2017	Using Nvivo
Data translation	Jan-Dec, 2017	Translate relevant data
Data archiving	March, 2018	Destroy recordings and save transcripts in encrypted external hard drive
Data Formats		
Focus Groups		MP4 Recordings using Voice Record Pro for iPhone
Interviews		.Zip files of Whatsapp interviews
Questionnaires		Physical biographical data questionnaires for focus groups
Data Analysis Software		
Focus Groups		NVivo
Interviews		
Questionnaires		
Data Storage and Management During Research		
MP4 Recordings	Exported to Microsoft OneDrive through the app then deleted from phone. Downloaded to PC, encrypted, and then uploaded again.	
WhatsApp Interviews	Exported to Microsoft OneDrive through app as a .Zip file.	
Questionnaires	Answers will be entered into Excel in batch of focus group and shredded. Individual interviewees will be asked questions as part of the chat and the answers will be entered into an excel sheet and modified with each additional respondents. Excel files will be encrypted and uploaded to UCL OneDrive.	
Backup	During the research primary copies of the encrypted data will be stored on the UCL Student home drive (N:)	

Organisation and Labelling	
<p>Labelling: Folder names: (type of data)_(initials if applicable) Examples Focus Groups_HA File names: (type of data)_(date in xx-xx-xxxx format)_(facilitator initials)_location. Abbreviations: Focus group audio: FG Focus group transcriptions: FGTX Interviews: IN Questionnaires: PF# Transcription: TR Examples: FG_25-06-2016_HA_AIHASSA IN_30-10-2016_HA_KHOBAR</p>	<p>Organisation: Data will be stored in OneDrive in the following folders:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus Group Audio_HA 2. Focus Group Audio NG 3. Focus Group Transcripts 4. WhatsApp Interviews 5. Other Interviews 6. Questionnaires
Security of Data	
<p>The following measures will be applied to protect the data:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Password protected devices. 2. Remove identifiable information through anonymisation. 3. Data storage encryption using BitLocker. 4. Data stored on OneDrive only. 5. Data will only be used in compliance with consent forms. 	
Data Sharing	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data will be shared with a research assistant (RA) using OneDrive. 2. A formal contract will be signed to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Include ethical standards that RA must comply with. b. Acknowledge that the data is my property and may only be used as stated in the agreement. c. Include this data management plan as an appendix. 3. All audio recorded by research assistant will be encrypted and uploaded to OneDrive and shared with me. I will transcribe the focus groups, share the text with the research assistant via OneDrive to cross check. After suggestions and changes are made, sharing will be disabled. 	
Data Storage After Research	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recordings will be securely deleted after three years, or until I complete my research. 2. Transcriptions will be stored on an encrypted hard drive in order to make it available for future follow-up research or for publication purposes, in accordance with DPA 1998. 	

Table 4-6 Data management plan

4.3.6 Focus Groups

Focus group research fit into the constructivist research design as it allowed me to investigate social experiences as they are understood at a collective level. According to Bloor (2001, p. 44), focus groups are useful to help understand underlying assumptions that are taken for granted by individuals due to the nature of their interactions within their collective, and they can “yield data on the uncertainties, ambiguities, and group processes that lead to and underlie group assessments” (Bloor, 2001, p. 6). Due to the varying views on what constitutes a focus group (Frey and Fontana, 1991; Morgan, 1996), I will adopt Morgan’s definition of a focus group as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). Although the focus group is a common tool used by market researchers, (Bloor, 2001; Frey and Fontana, 1991; Morgan, 1996; Morgan and Bottorff, 2010; Silverman, 2014) social scientists are increasing their utilization of this technique in various ways. Ryan et al. (2014) distinguish between the different ways of designing a focus group based on the type of information and the focus of the research. As my research aims to better understand young people’s perceptions of education and employment opportunities and decisions, my focus group design therefore combined elements that aimed to learn more about individual reasoning but also about the way opinions are socially situated.

As discussed in Chapter Three, young people’s pragmatic decision-making process is theorised as a result of individual life opportunities that are situated within the broader context in which they live, the opportunities presented to them within this context, and the phases of routine and change that they are faced with (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). The focus groups therefore sought to understand these three overlapping components of pragmatic decision-making. Focus groups require participants to recall beliefs, opinions and ‘socially shared knowledge’ within a group

setting (Silverman, 2014, p. 210), and “It is through the stories participants tell themselves and each other that multiple meanings and the richness of their social world emerge, sometimes in surprising ways” (Ryan *et al.*, 2014, p. 331). Group interviews can reveal the social and cultural context of people’s understandings and beliefs” (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 61) looking for the subjective “naturalistic and closer to everyday life” (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 62).

For Bloor, in a focus group “the objective is not primarily to elicit the group’s answers but rather to stimulate discussion and thereby understand (through subsequent analysis) the meanings and norms which underlie those group answers” (Bloor, 2001, p. 43). And while focus groups may not produce as many ideas as individual interviews, and result in data that is difficult to analyse and compare, (Morgan, 1996, p. 138), the focus groups were supplemented by interview data. Other weaknesses of focus groups relate to the quality of the moderator on the group’s discussion agenda, which can also happen in an interview, and the increased polarization of opinions after the fact (Morgan, 1996, p. 140). In order to avoid such quality issues a very clear focus group guide and activities were prepared and piloted. Even with such precautions, the data was often difficult to discern with overlapping voices and interjections. Fortunately, potential gaps in information were filled in by the in-depth interviews, which are described in more depth in the next section.

The focus group questions were designed to spark conversations between participants about how their respective institute was viewed by them and others as well as the experiences that resulted in their being in the schools or colleges, and any related decisions and deliberation that may have occurred. I asked about the classes, teachers/trainers and future opportunities. The focus group questions also explored relationships, social capital and guidance. Finally, all students were asked to contemplate regrets and aspirations for the future. For a full list of questions, prompts and follow up suggestions, see Appendices 11,13,16 and 17).

	Female Students	Male Students	Total Institutes
General Secondary - Public	3	4	7
General Secondary – Private	2	1	3
Technical/Vocational Secondary	NA	2	2
Technical/Vocational Post-Secondary – Public	1	2	3
Technical/Vocational Post-Secondary – Private		1	1
Total Students	49	79	16

Table 4-7 Sample of focus group students

Each focus group included between 6-10 participants and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The participants were selected by the individual school or college’s administration. The suggestion to the institutes was to include a diverse group of students, with varying academic standings. Rather than mix students from different schools, each group remained relatively homogeneous, in their social backgrounds but diverse in their attainment. This allowed for differences in opinion but avoided “violently differing perspectives on emotive issues” (Barbour, 2007, p. 59).

In addition to the field questions, the focus groups involved activities and visual prompts to spark discussion and maintain interest with the cohort. Including images was a way to “combine respect, inclusion and protection” for the respondents (Alderson, 2011, p. 52). Literature related to the interpretation of generated data and mechanisms of applying this that critically considers the benefits and limitations have been taken into account (Fielding, 2007; Lyon and Carabelli, 2015). To generate answers to questions that had multiple answers, such as which aspects of one’s background influences their educational choices, a brainstorming activity using a flip chart was used (Barbour, 2007). The facilitators then asked about which factors were most important or if anyone

disagreed with them. Another activity involved using images of people in different employment positions, and the students were asked to rank them according to their importance to themselves, their families and their communities. Finally, students were asked about which social factors affected their education and career aspirations and outlook. The images represented different aspects of Saudi cultural experiences. Students were asked to pick their top three factors and list them on a worksheet. Then, volunteers from the participants were selected to share their rankings and discuss a scenario that they had experienced to better explain how these factors are experienced in their lives. (See Appendices 16 and 17 for a sample of the images and for the worksheets).

4.3.7 Interviews

While the focus groups allowed for an insight into the opinions young people had of TVET, the interviews revealed more about the variations in these opinions. According to Rubin and Rubin “Responsive interviewing is about learning what people think about their experiences and what rules they operate under” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 37). My reading of the context (See Chapter Two) necessitated that I understand individual perspectives as the varying social backgrounds would produce different habitus, and would thus lead to different ways of navigating through the education and career fields (See Chapter Three). The focus group data was thus complemented by in-depth interviews “to explore specific opinions and experiences in more depth, as well as to produce narratives that address the continuity of personal experiences over time (Duncan & Morgan 1994 cited Morgan, 1996, p. 134). My goal was to gain in-depth insight into how young people make decisions, and so it was important to establish rapport and ensure that the respondents were comfortable and trusting. In-depth interviews allowed for a deeper look into the features of the Saudi society and the ways context influences decision-making. In line with the criteria used for selecting focus group participants, the interviewees also represented a mix of backgrounds from the research

sites.

Using the focus group data as an initial guide, I created respondent profiles to identify potential interview candidates. I looked at the way students described their experiences on a structure-agency spectrum: the experiences were between being conformist, i.e. doing exactly what they described as ideal by social standards, or the participants claimed to act beyond expectations. Although these categories were not distinct, and there were many overlapping characteristics, I was able to identify five main profiles, and sought out participants that covered these as outlined in table 4-7.

Conformist attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work hard in secondary • Aspire to pursue highest possible specialisation in university or study abroad (medicine, engineering) • Wants family support and approval • Compromises personal aspirations for family • Sees family approval and personal success as one • Graduates, gets salaried job (preferably in Aramco/Sabic or government) gets married, plays traditional gender role in home • Distinguishes her/himself by enterprising business on the side
Last resort (male)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium/good academic attainment in secondary (possibly private school) • Rejected from academic programs/universities • Articulates father's disappointment and mother's push to continue studies • Unhappily accepts place in vocational college to please family • Does not get specialisation of choice • Believes that others took their place using their connections (<i>wasta</i>) • Doesn't trust employers will value his hard work • Is worried about future risks and potential to achieve traditional markers of adulthood (marriage, home) • Focuses on caring for parents

Positive alternative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attainment in secondary • Surprised to be rejected by universities • Tries to get a <i>wasta</i> to help him/her get into program • Eventually enrolls in TVET or in training ending in employment • Finds that the work is more in line with his/her aspirations • Finds a community within the college that appreciates the environment • Finds the teachers/challenges to be more inclusive and sensitive • Sees the value in what s/he is learning and appreciates vocational training • Hopes to continue education within the technical field
Dead end	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium attainment in secondary • Applies to one university (locally) and does not get in • Focuses more on friendships and hanging out • Relies on parent financially/articulates parents' disappointment • Avoids technical training due to lack of trust in currency of certification • Engages in 'independent work' (selling veg at market, taxiing/uber) • Prays for a <i>wasta</i> to come along
Intentional choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has already studied/worked elsewhere • Realises that certifications are valued by employers and will open more doors • Chooses to go into TVET to acquire specific skills • Finds a community of learners and is engaged in TVET learning • Aspires to work in a TVET related field • IT or office management • Young men: oil and manufacturing related fields

Table 4-8 Categories of Respondents

These profiles were further explored and refined in the interviews and factored into the analysis of the data in Chapters Five and Six.

Most of the interview participants were selected from the students from the focus groups who indicated that they were interested in participating in individual interviews. These students were approached and asked if they would still like to participate. Since there was a time gap between my focus group data collection and interviews, not all respondents were still available for interview once I messaged them, however I was still able to recruit several students that had presented different attitudes and had varying experiences. In addition to these participants, the smaller number of young female participants who were enrolled in colleges prompted me to utilise a snowball method and I was able to recruit two more interviewees. I was also able to recruit one student through the social media platform Twitter, as she was identified as a student of a semi-private college in Al Khobar, by contacting her via direct message.

The students I met personally in the focus groups first, and then continued with the interview in WhatsApp were the most candid, and our interviews tended to have a conversational, relaxed feel. I would ask questions and they would respond with long answers from the beginning, which felt intimate and personal. These respondents also wanted me to help them make decisions and asked my opinion about the choices they had made. The ones that my research assistants met were slightly more reserved at first, but then opened up, and answered questions in detail. Almost all of the students asked me more details about myself at the end of the chats, as if they felt that they had just revealed many details about themselves and wanted to know more about me. I shared information that was relevant to my current study and the past work that inspired my research once our interviews were over. Only two students contacted me again in the future. One young woman from the technical college asking how I was doing, and the other was a young man from the technical college that wanted advice about his future career choice. This did not feel intrusive but indicated to me that they had been very honest and felt comfortable. The respondents I met through the snowball method were also quite candid, but more careful, as some of their answers appeared more reserved. The one interviewee I recruited online through Twitter was not at all candid. She was

sceptical about my intentions, and her answers were written in formal language. She frequently checked in to see 'how her answers were'. Her responses were very different from the other participants. For a full list of in-depth interview questions, see Appendix 15.

4.3.8 Using WhatsApp as an interview method

I wanted to conduct the interviews myself, rather than rely on the research assistants, to ensure that I would be able to divert from the interview schedule when necessary for the purpose of additional and more effective probing. However, considering the cultural limitations mentioned above, I chose to do this using an online method. Choosing an online or offline site is often situated in the demands of a specific research goal, and due to several contextual circumstances, I chose to use the smart phone application WhatsApp as a data collection method. WhatsApp enables synchronous written chatting via smartphones as well as voice note sharing and quick photo and video and internet link transfers. Due to the popularity of WhatsApp in my cohort, I suggested utilizing this as a platform to conduct the interviews.

Although there was unpredictability involved in utilizing this method, that is often the case in qualitative research, as the unpredictability of research methodology lies in "the very unpredictability of the situations which will form the setting for the research" (Hine, 2005, p. 2). The unpredictability of using WhatsApp was largely due to the absence of published research that utilised this method. However, changes in the nature of online research has led to its application in various situations. While earlier research on utilizing computer-mediated communication strategies focused on using the online space as a site of research, exploring people's behaviour online, more recent research focuses on how to utilise data generated online to access hard to reach people and to analyse data about offline behaviour through their online interactions (Hine, 2005). Hutchinson (2016) describes the process of synchronously chatting in real-time versus the more popular asynchronous e-mail interview to have "gained popularity due to their

technical ease, and their potential to generate reflexive discussions (James and Busher, 2006)” (Quoted in Hutchinson, 2016). She explains how the accessibility aspect of online research gives it an attractive edge. This research was useful as a justification for adopting WhatsApp as an interview method.

Accessibility and technological constraints were one concern of using WhatsApp. However, I believed that the usual obstacles would not be applicable to my cohort. Hope (2016) argues that younger participants are more inclined to use online modes. Based on my experience in Saudi Arabia, WhatsApp has been selected for the following reasons:

1. It is the most popular chatting application used by all age groups in Saudi Arabia, and most Saudis are accustomed to using it for individual and group chatting.
2. Other chatting applications such as Skype, Facetime, and even e-mail are rarely used, especially by this cohort.
3. Mixed gender face to face interviewing (including even video chatting) can cause cultural discomfort as unrelated male and females rarely mix outside of the family or corporate world.

WhatsApp is a smart phone application that once downloaded uses your phone number as an identifier. It allows you to send messages, similar to texts, but is more multimodal and allows for the easy transfer of images, videos, voice notes and other media. It offers end to end encryption, so if a chat is deleted from a user’s phone, it is no longer available. The application is downloadable for free once connected to the internet. Since most people are familiar with it, there was no special software or a learning curve, and it supports Arabic. When a phone number is added to your contacts list, it automatically appears in WhatsApp if the user has the application. You can reach your contacts at any time, but they also have the choice to block you. The application offers an option to users to make their activity invisible, so the sender cannot see when his/her message has been read by the receiver. I did not have to schedule interviews, instead, I messaged students and asked them if it was a good time, and if not, I would get in contact later and see if they were free. Even if they were not completely free, they were often happy to

chat while simultaneously doing something else, so it made the interview scheduling quite smooth. We did set times sometimes, but they were flexible.

Although face-to-face interviews are seen as a more personalised interaction, research has shown that an online site can create a sense of security that may actually provide a more intimate space, leading to candid reporting and sharing (Epstein, Barker and Kroutil 2001; Des Jarlais et al. 1999; Lessler et al. 2000; Tourangeau & Smith 1996; Lau, Tsui and Wang 2003; Tourangeau 2004 cited Hine, 2005, p. 25), and a level of directness and richness that can be enhanced through punctuation and emoticons (Hine, 2005, p. 17; Hope, 2016, p. 82). Hine (2005) argues that although online communication has been criticised as being impersonal, “counter to the stereotype, online interactions can be socially rich interactions” albeit with limitations (Hine, 2005, p. 17). Synchronous chatting allows for the immediate provision of clarifications, establishing a relationship that can help build rapport. In contrast to a telephone conversation, WhatsApp created enough of a ‘buffer zone’ between me and the male respondents, as a woman’s voice is portrayed as private in many conservative Islamic interpretations of gender roles. Before beginning the interview, I messaged the prospective interviewees and introduced myself as the researcher, my name, background and reminded them of the focus groups that they took part in. All of these students had indicated on their pro-forma questionnaires that they were happy to be contacted by the main researcher and provided their phone numbers for this purpose. Hence, all my WhatsApp respondents knew that I was female.

According to Hine (2005), research has highlighted the difficulty in striking a balance between “being attentive and empathetic to informants on the one hand, while maintaining distance and appropriate researcher-informant relationship on the other” (Hine, 2005, p. 56). I believe that I overcame this by writing with a degree of formality and avoiding sharing personal information unless asked, but working hard to be present and to reply to messages (Hine, 2005, p. 57). The willingness of participants to participate and share on WhatsApp was testament to the effectiveness of the method.

The data generated through interviews re-enforced that which was shared in focus groups, but provided a space to elaborate and share more details and experiences.

WhatsApp provided an opportunity for synchronous chatting that capitalised on gauging the flow and engagement in a conversation, and the opportunity to adjust questioning pace and wording to ensure sustained interest. The interviews typically took place in one sitting, from the introduction to the consent, to a back and forth conversation between me and the interviewee. These lasted between one to two hours. On some occasions, we took a break due to them needing to leave, and on one occasion due to an interruption of internet service at my end. It was only on one occasion that I could not reach the respondent again after the interview was interrupted. I argue that despite those minimal interruptions, the interviewees were accustomed to WhatsApp chatting that they were not disruptive to the data collection process, and the interview resumed quickly upon re-establishing a time where both interviewer and interviewee were free to chat. Hine (2005) shows that while the traditional argument against online research discusses what is lost in online interactions, such as loss of visual and feedback cues, “historical analyses strongly suggest that a loss of visual cues need not be accompanied by concurrent reduction in the ‘socialness’ of interaction” (Hine, 2005, p. 22), and by some accounts it is more social than face-to-face interaction (Rheingold 1993a; Walther 1996 Cited in Hine, 2005, p. 22) Hine also reports that some studies don’t find any differences in online and offline reporting (Fox and Schwarz 2002; Birnbaum 2004; Buchanan and Joinson 2004 cited Hine, 2005, p. 25).

While the available academic literature on the use of WhatsApp differs from my study by focusing on discourse and language features, these studies are useful in considering the types of communication and what that may reveal about the answers generated by using the medium for interviews. The studies focus on the linguistic features of computer mediated communication (CMC), but also examine the use of the application in clinical settings and communication in the medical field between surgeons and medical professionals and their patients, as a medium for support groups, as well

as for sharing information of patients' data (Vu Henry *et al.*, 2016). The discourse of CMC is widely researched, and often focuses on both the negative aspects of language use in text messages by youth, and the possible benefits of engaging in communication regardless of language accuracy (Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya, 2015). What distinguishes WhatsApp is the multimodal nature of the application, allowing for the combination of text, emoticons, voice, and so on. The multimodality characterises WhatsApp as combining elements of written and spoken language, and digital discourse is often defined as having features of transferring orally oriented discourse to the written form (Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya, 2015, p. 54). Research shows that a variety of tools can be used in order to manage text-based conversations such as different prompts and sequencing methods. One study showed how when laughter is used in a freestanding message, it can be an efficient resource for dealing with delicate situations or sensitive topics, thus allowing for managing speakership and signalling turn allocation and terminating a topic similar to face to face interactions (Petitjean and Morel, 2017). I missed the additional intimacy that may come with face to face interviews, but I believe that there was another level of intimacy as a result of this platform that gave comfortable anonymity and allowed for a window into the lives of these young people.

This section has described and discussed the different methods of data collection and the rationale for each. The following section will discuss the ethical implications of data collection that were considered.

4.3.9 Validity of collected data

In qualitative studies, validity differs from quantitative research as it is not searching for the consistency of responses or generalizability of findings (Creswell, 2003) but instead is used to suggest that the findings are accurate from the researcher's standpoint (Creswell, 2003, p. 195). The quality, depth and richness of the data that I gathered points to a research design that was effective in generating data that enabled me to answer the research questions. The findings showed meaningful parallels across focus

group and interview data. The interview data revealed concurrent themes with the focus group data but shed more light on the diverse individual experiences of young people, and the different social influences on choice and opportunity.

In considering the credibility and validity of the data, I followed qualitative data analysis methods to question and check the data frequently (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend different queries, and three main ones informed my questioning: are the descriptions context rich and meaningful? Have rival explanations been considered? Have findings been replicated in different parts of the data than where they arose? (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 279). Creswell (2003, p. 195) notes the importance of noting the researcher's bias, which I refer to in Chapter One, as well as in the ethical considerations section of this chapter below.

I found that the generated data, presented in Chapters Five and Six was rich and the ideas were grounded in personal experiences that helped me answer my question about subjective perceptions of opportunity and limitations.

4.3.10 Ethical Implications and Reflexive considerations

While the empirical research took place outside of the United Kingdom, the research adhered to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (BERA, 2011). Ethical concerns related to gender sensitivity were considered in depth. I did not find any laws barring me from collecting research in Saudi Arabia or transferring it out of the Kingdom. However, since disseminating politically sensitive conclusions can pose risks to researchers, I avoided using an overly political conceptual framework and minimised disclosure of any findings that would harm me or my research assistant while maintaining highest standards of integrity. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reform policy launched in April 2016 is more critical and open about the importance of change and reform and includes references to education and culture. In the Foreword of the Vision, Prince Mohammed bin Salman states "We will be transparent and open about our

failures as well as our successes and will welcome ideas on how to improve”²⁹. The vision has been disseminated to all parts of society; from ministries to schools to media and has created a new narrative through which the future of the country is described and approached. My aim was not to be a dissident voice, but to make constructive recommendations about policy advancement through empirical findings and evidence. Research I participated in in the past allowed for this and was led by governmental bodies. The lens I chose to view and analyse my data was therefore key and involved careful consideration of the collected data. The new reform vision allowed for boundary pushing as it encourages all sectors of society to be a part of advancement and research.

Focus group composition was mostly homogenous to minimise any potential embarrassment and discomfort, which was not anticipated due to the nature of the questions, however, could have arisen when discussing family background and parental relations, or decisions that deviate from what is considered the social norm. I noticed however, in cases where there was diversity and ones that were more homogeneous alike, there was a strong desire to disclose experiences, and the focus groups were considered a welcome platform to share opinions, and in many cases ask for advice (which was given very sparingly after the session, if at all). As discussed in 4.3.5, literature regarding the use of visual images was also taken into consideration. All focus group participants signed two physical informed consent forms, one of which was collected, and another copy remained with them. The pace and sequence of questions aimed to gradually move from general to specific questions, in an effort to provide a non-judgemental space that ensured mutual trust and respect, wherein the students did not

²⁹ Al-Saud, M. b. S. (2016). Vision 2030 Foreword. In Council of Economic and Development Affairs (ed). Riyadh.

feel led or pressured to answer in certain ways. The quality of generated data showed that this was achieved.

Due to the age of secondary students, passive parental approval was sought (Jason, Pokorny and Katz, 2001). If the students chose to opt out, they were able to do so, otherwise consent was assumed. This method was chosen because there was less than minimal intended harm on the students by participating in the research and therefore, involving extra layers of consent would have delayed the process rather than facilitating it. Consent was also sought from the secondary and tertiary institutes the students attended.

The data were collected on my iPhone 6 which was fingerprint and pin-code protected. All electronic data was encrypted using BitLocker and stored on the UCL OneDrive for Business SharePoint, which offers encryption during upload and at rest, and allows for sharing files with specified people while remaining encrypted.

All approach letters clearly outlined that as part of the conditions for agreeing to participate, students must participate voluntarily and must not feel obligated to participate, nor should they feel that they would be penalised in any way for participating or refusing to do so. Their informed consent form included a paragraph about this agreement. Additionally, participating institutions were asked to sign a guarantee that the students' participation would not affect them academically nor impact their roles within their institutions. Students were shown a copy of this at the beginning of the interview or focus group. This specified that the participating institutions were not given access to any of the data or students' responses before it was sufficiently anonymised. The focus groups all took place at the students' institutions, and therefore, students were reminded why they were participating, and additional rapport was established by presenting the research as a break from the routine, providing a space in which they could express their opinions openly and safely.

WhatsApp was used only for the individual interviews to ensure that participants could only see their own responses in the chat, as opposed to viewing and saving the

responses of their peers in a group conversation, for instance. In order to ensure that the participant's data remained private on their phone as well as mine, I shared three main points as I introduced the research:

- a. Throughout the interview, we would not use any names but refer to other parties by their roles, e.g. instructor, administrator, counsellor, classmate, etc.
- b. It was suggested that the participant delete the conversation from their phone so that nobody who had access to their phone after the chat accessed it, as a further measure of precaution. While there is no guarantee of this, there is also no guarantee that the student would not be recording a phone conversation or the interview. However, due to the nature of the data as low-risk, a mutual agreement in writing was sufficient to safeguard all parties involved.
- c. I deleted the conversation from my WhatsApp chat history as soon as the data was exported.

My experience with WhatsApp and with employing research assistants highlighted many of my own considerations surrounding space and gender relationships and the importance of gender politics in Saudi society. I opted for a research assistant to avoid 'cultural sensitivities' and to minimise discomfort, but also for practical reasons. It was easier to conduct focus groups with students during school/college hours rather than try to arrange a meeting separately and in a neutral space that I could access. I doubted that there would be discomfort in such a space, but I was also nervous that there would be. In the three male focus groups that I did run, I was reassured repeatedly by administrators that the male students would not mind my presence, and indeed, they were candid and respectful. However, I argue that especially in secondary schools where many students are not exposed to any gender mixing, utilising male research assistants enhanced the data collection process and the willingness of students to answer questions and share experiences in a group setting rather than detract from it. (See Table 4-4 for a breakdown of the focus group facilitation).

My experience interviewing young men on WhatsApp was positive, arguably due to the buffer zone provided by the application. In holding a position of authority, the young

men showed respect that was borderline chauvinistic, as one of the young men did not want to share any of his classmates' contact information because he could not guarantee that they would be respectful, believing that they were immature. The dominating gender politics in Saudi dictate that unrelated men and women cannot be alone together. This is furthered by separate public spaces for men and women, as well as separate social circles even amongst close family members outside the nuclear circle.

4.3.11 Researcher positionality

In the introduction, I described one experience I had when visiting schools as part of my work with the Ministry of Education (See Section 1.1.1.3). That experience raised many questions about choice, inspiring this work and my research focus. As an extension to that project, my team received funding from the Ministry of Labour (MOL) and the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) to expand the program and travel to different parts of Saudi Arabia. The MOL chose a city nearly 1700 Kilometers away from where we were based in Al Khobar. Fully equipped with our three-year old project guide, and with documentation supporting our affiliation with the MOL and HRDF, both of which have regional offices, we began contacting the relevant offices in this other city to coordinate our event. We also obtained approval from the Ministry of Education due to our previous endeavours within the Eastern Province. To run the career fair, we needed a venue and volunteers from the community to represent the different careers. At first, all of our letters, emails and calls were ignored. We had assumed that our affiliation with the MOL and HRDF, as well as having stamped letters of approval stating our purpose would be enough, but quickly realised we would need a different strategy on the ground. I remembered a friend from secondary school who was originally from this region, and who had mentioned going there on different occasions. One awkward phone call to someone I had not spoken to for well over a decade later was all it took. Suddenly, rather than being ignored, we were spoilt for choice. We were answering calls from different venues and the local university offered us contact with their students to

advertise for volunteers. My contact had a relative who was very well connected, and who was able to vouch for our legitimacy. We did not have to pay any additional fees or pay bribes or do favours, but without a nod of approval, we would have failed to organise the event.

Who you know in Saudi Arabia is paramount. Official letters and approvals are essential, and without them we would have lost our legitimacy with the locals in that region quickly, however such legitimacy means nothing without the appropriate local 'street cred'. My friend from secondary school was our 'wasta' for that event (See Section 2.3). This story illustrates the power of relationships in Saudi Arabia, and the degree to which relationships are in many ways localised, but also continue to hold legitimacy when geographical locations change. My status as a local in the Eastern Province allowed me to contact relevant people in the offices of the Ministry of Education, relevant teachers and administrators in local schools, and businesspeople who had access to those responsible for the local branch of TVTC in the Eastern Province. My previous work with a large Saudi company gave me access to private training institutes. My work with the Chamber of Commerce in previous years allowed me to call on a friend for my pilot study. My contacts from the Ministries of Labour and Education helped me identify the appropriate offices to submit my requests for data to obtain approvals at the institutional level. And finally, my family name, known locally due to my family's role in business and industry within the Eastern Province meant that I was 'one of them'. These were my wastas: the reason I was trusted by those in the research sites, and the reason I was able to collect data. My wastas ensured that my calls were taken. At every step I was asked to show the appropriate paperwork, which included a letter from my supervisor, a letter from UCL declaring my student status, and a letter from the Saudi Cultural Bureau validating this.

Being a local in Saudi Arabia allowed me access to the stories of the young people I identified as necessary respondents for my research questions. To Western researchers, my position as a woman educated abroad may appear to present a

disadvantage, however on the ground in Saudi Arabia, having been educated within Saudi schools, my social networks and awareness of the local codes and social expectations, as well as my sensitivity to cultural norms was indeed an advantage. This, in combination with what I have learned through my education abroad, and my reading of research situated in other contexts and how this has been theorised has allowed me to reflect on the sentiments that were shared by the young people in this study. I believe that in combination with my local knowledge, my exposure to different cultures has allowed me to view these sentiments critically, reflect on them, and analyse them through multiple lenses rather than take them at face value.

4.4 Data Analysis

This chapter has outlined the methodological underpinnings of the research design, and the data sources and collection method. The constructivist interpretive methodology was selected to generate data that could provide insights into the way in which initial TVET is perceived and regarded in Saudi Arabia through the voice of young people. The methodology was selected to ensure that the perceptions were examined through the voices of young people, situated within their social context. And while there were several ethical considerations and safeguarding methods, the approach aimed to provide a safe outlet for young people to express their concerns within a prescriptive system, as described in Chapter Two, that does not often give voice to its participants. The data analysis approach was thematic, guided by the chosen theoretical framework, informed by the local context, but more importantly, driven and informed by the responses, questions and sentiments of the interviewed young people. In the following two chapters, I will present the voices of the interviewed young people, utilizing the analysis method described above, giving insight to their experiences of TVET and the variations of individual experiences within their social structures.

The 18 focus groups and 16 individual interviews generated a very large amount of rich qualitative data. Especially in the focus groups, some of the students were more

articulate than others, and their voices are more commonly cited. Over 50% of the students were quoted throughout Chapters Six and Seven (See Appendix 23 for a list of the students who are quoted). I analysed the data thematically, following a process inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001). I also used phenomenological analysis methods in the initial sorting and organization of the data to identify recurring themes (Creswell, 2007, pp. 193-94). In the following sections, I will describe the process I followed in greater depth, explaining the process of transcribing and translating, coding, and analysis.

4.4.1 Transcribing and translating

Transcription was done with the support of external transcriptionists, but all data was then reviewed and translated by me (See Appendices 18 and 19 for samples of transcriptions and translations). I used Nvivo primarily as a data organization tool, as it allowed me to sort answers by the different questions, gender and type of institute. I did not follow a strict transcription method, as I was not interested in the temporal nature of the data or the discourse patterns, but was looking for meanings in their responses.

There were two types of focus groups that needed to be transcribed, the ones that I conducted myself and the ones conducted by the research assistants. Before transcribing them, I listened to the full recordings, once for my own and often twice for the ones done by the research assistants. I then first transcribed into Arabic, and translated into English. During the process of translating into English I made many notes in the margins of impressions that would help with the coding process. This was a very lengthy process, and while I had some support with the transcription, the quality was mediocre and needed editing and re-reading. The positive side is that I became very familiar with the transcriptions and felt very close to the participants.

I translated all of the data in order to be able to better utilise the Nvivo features, but did not use a highly standardised translation method. Studies show that conveying the same message between languages can be challenging, especially when different

dialects are used (Al Amer *et al.*, 2016; Twinn, 1997), however considering my own proximity to the data and my understanding of the cultural and local nuances of the language, I do not believe that any of the meanings were lost in translation. In the instances that I sought the help of an external translator, I had to edit significantly as the dialect differences proved a barrier. The transcriptions were translated in a verbatim form of the narrative, and where there were slight variations in translation at times, a reference back to the recordings helped to ensure that the integrity of the data and the meanings were preserved.

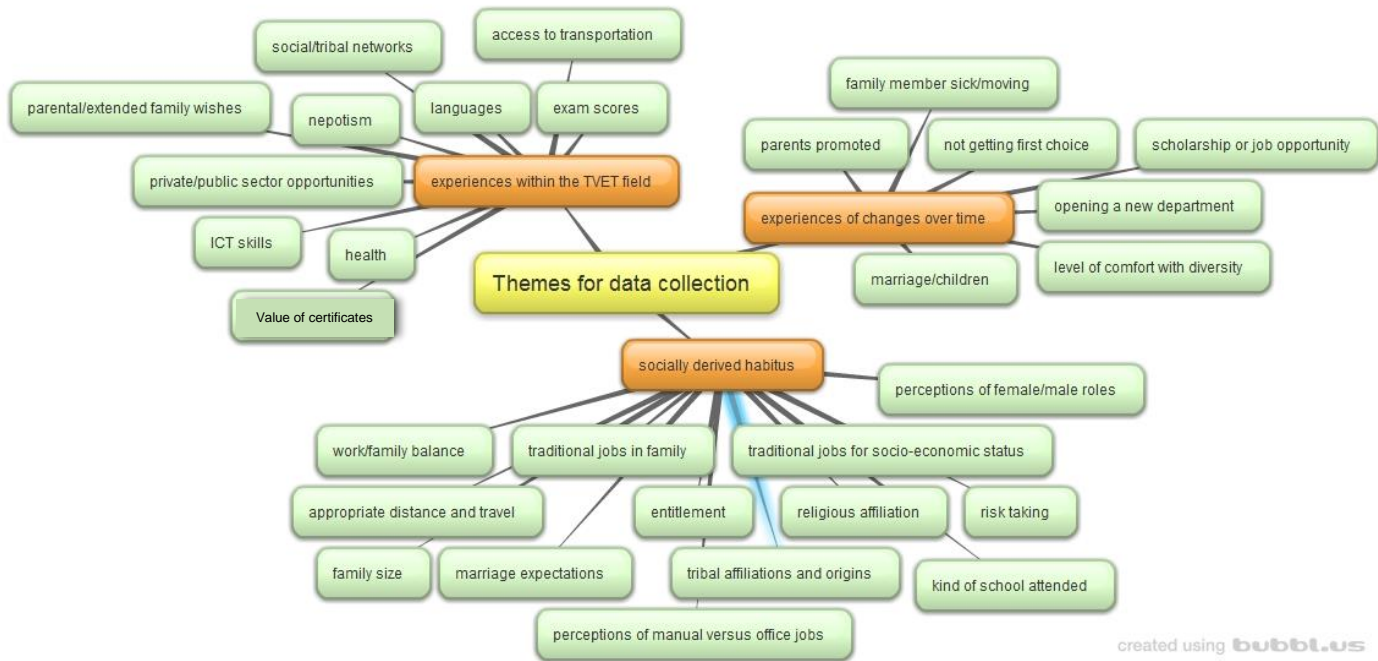
4.4.2 Coding

Once the data was transcribed and checked against the audio recordings and translated, I used the 'themes for data collection' mind map that I included in my upgrade document to highlight the text using three colours:

- Pink for 'experiences within the TVET field'
- Green for 'experiences of change over time'
- Orange for 'socially derived habitus'

Coding was done iteratively, first with the focus group data, and then with the interview data. I initially deductively identified codes informed by the careership theory utilising a mind map of 'themes for data collection' (See Figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1 Themes for data collection



The data was sorted into different groups using NVivo. I also took notes in the margins next to the highlighted text. I began to look at the notes that I took in the margins and the three colours that I used to highlight the text and created a table to put down notes and quotes for each colour. Table 4-8 provides an example of the process from one of the focus groups.

Experiences within the TVET field (pink)	
Notes	Quotes
Employment/ Work	<p>It's a technical institute that specialises in teaching students that enrol in more than one specialization that helps them go into oil companies</p> <p>I got a job in the company AYTb, which was as a mechanic, and I accepted it and I had to leave Schlumberger because of the welding position</p> <p>You train for two years, and then depending on the company you sign a contract with, you begin work</p> <p>You don't find a good job in the place you're from, so you have to search to get experience it's better for you, even if the company was small, you get some experience for yourself and then you apply to other companies</p> <p>It's kind of a quicker way to get a job</p>

Specialization	<p>“It’s a technical institute that specialises in teaching students that enrol in more than one specialization that helps them go into oil companies”</p> <p>“they distribute you into different companies without our knowledge, you don’t know what specialization.. and then after you start by about two weeks you know what you will be studying, it’s not a choice”</p> <p>“each specialisation, for instance, welding, you could specialise more and go study two years outside, or a year, and take some courses outside of Saudi as they are not available here, and this course, you come back almost an engineer or something like that, and it has a higher salary and better benefits and there’s a demand from all companies, like ports, and other oil companies, I mean, it opens up a lot of doors and fields, if you study welding here, and then you graduate and its just a technical job in an oil company, but no, otherwise you would be wanted in ports, other companies, they benefit from you more”</p>
Future study	
Experiences of change over time (green)	
employment	<p>I wanted a bachelor’s degree but after I saw it, and I saw that it guarantees you a job and a future, especially in big companies, I mean, not small companies, so I agreed at the end</p> <p>I came the first month it was like, bad...I didn’t accept the situation, but time passed and I thought about it if I went back I wouldn’t get the same employment opportunity</p> <p>I didn’t care about a specific major to be honest, when I started at the institute</p>
Preferences	<p>I studied medicine for two years, and I didn’t like it. It turns out I don’t really like to study</p> <p>I was set back, time wise [in pursuit of my desired specialization]</p> <p>I have heard about electricity, mechanics, but when I try it potentially I will not master this field, I will fail in it, because I’m not passionate about it for example, and it isn’t my passion</p>
Socially derived habitus (orange)	
Family connection	<p>If they do find jobs they’re in remote areas and they don’t want to leave their cities and their families to go to them</p> <p>Maybe if the person went alone it wouldn’t be so hard, as a young man, maybe it would be easy, but maybe it would be harder if he would need to take his family or something</p>
Reputation	<p>You would be forsaken in the place you’re from if you don’t have work or anything to do</p> <p>You leave so people don’t talk about you</p> <p>I like the idea that it’s training and the reputation, the institute... had a really good reputation</p> <p>We all aspire to work in big companies ...their financial status, they give you a good salary, and it’s a known company, I mean it’s known, it’s a global company</p>

Table 4-9 Sample of focus group coding process

4.4.3 Analysing focus groups

Using the coded data, I was able to identify key themes related to individual perceptions of TVET education and career opportunities, as well as references to structural influences on perceptions and aspirations, applying a data-driven inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I began by reading the focus group data very closely, which allowed me to familiarise myself with the common recurring themes, and refine a list of significant statements. Table 4-9 shows a sample of how the codes were related to themes and the theoretical framework:

Q1. In times of transition, how do young Saudi's subjective perceptions of career opportunities influence their career aspirations and choices in relation to TVET?			
Themes	Definition	Theory	Codes
Family	How a young person's family's aspirations and their relationship within the family influence their views and actions about post-secondary education and training	Family habitus habitus	Father/mother/siblings/uncles Family permission Sense of family responsibility
Gender	How gendered education and occupation norms influence perceptions of opportunity and aspirations	Agency Patriarchy (structure) Habitus Socialization Meritocracy	Availability of opportunity 'gendered' jobs Mixing at workplace Marriage Children Transportation
Aspirations	What kinds of education, training, universities, jobs, careers and futures young people hope to achieve in the future	Family habitus Symbolic capital Economic capital Structural barriers	Aramco etc. Military Qualifications Reputation Motivation Achievement Laziness
Future opportunities	What kinds of future opportunities young people believe to be realistic or unattainable	Agency Socialization Nationalism	Work ethic Free time Initiative Field of work Nationalism

Socialisation	Instances of changing perceptions of an opportunity once it is experienced or encountered	Agency Socialisation	Value of training Acceptance of gendered jobs Meritocracy <i>Wasta</i> Reputation
<i>Wasta</i> , connections	The value that is placed on something in relation to how it is viewed by others in society		
social networks	How <i>wasta</i> and other social connections enable or restrict access to different kinds of education and training opportunities	Cultural capital Trust Meritocracy	<i>Wasta</i> Scholarships Nepotism Parents employment, connections Insider testimony
Education policies, practices and organisation	The extent to which education policies restrict or enable opportunities and influence perceptions of young people pursuing different post-secondary tracks	Structure Field Horizon for action Nationalism Uncertainty	Career guidance Curriculum Attainment Scholarships Last resort Qualifications Timeline Teacher quality Teachers' respect of students Quality of facilities

Table 4-10 Sample of grouping codes by theme and theoretical connections

I proceeded to write a textural description of the discussions with verbatim examples. Each educational setting provided a case that was then described using 'thick description' (Geertz, 2001). I focused first on the secondary participants, divided into young men and women, then on the college students, also divided into young men and young women. These descriptions became my main source of information, as they captured the essence of the different sources and sites of information, and highlighted the examples that represented the themes identified above. I then wrote several iterations of descriptions of these themes in light of the contextual setting and the theoretical framework. This was the longest process, as the shift from a descriptive and seemingly unrelated interpretation to a more comprehensive analysis underpinned by my methodological assumptions was interpreted in light of the theoretical framework and

context was iterative and non-linear. A six-stage approach was followed, described below:

1. Read the transcription
 - a. Highlight recurring words in Nvivo
 - b. Create list of codes
 - c. Group codes into loose themes
2. Create cases
 - a. People
 - b. Sites
 - c. Questions
 - d. Enter into NVivo
3. Highlight codes in the text
 - a. Take notes in margins
 - b. Describe the text before and after
 - c. Highlight quotes and examples
 - d. Deductive coding- from theoretical frame
 - e. Inductive coding – what is new?
4. Describe the cases using descriptive text
 - a. setting
 - b. demographic details
 - c. overall tone
 - d. relationships between participants
5. Create themes and relate to theory
 - a. Define themes in relation to theoretical frame
 - b. Discuss themes in relation to theories and context
 - c. List examples and evidence to support themes
6. Re-read descriptive text and
 - a. Check the evidence and the themes
 - b. Read theory and write about the evidence
 - c. Check notes, quotes and evidence again

4.4.4 Analysing interviews

Unlike the messy focus group data, the WhatsApp interviews did not need to be transcribed, and were treated like face to face interview data: “With the field of social media analytics still in relative infancy, there are few methodological practices taken as

standard. The tendency thus far has been to fit digital data to existing 'offline' ways of working" (Brooker *et al.*, 2016, p. 35). All of the interviews were written, so they were exported into a word document ready for coding and analysis.

The textural descriptions of the first few focus groups allowed me to adjust my interview schedule to enable me to probe deeper into individual experiences that were not described in depth in some of the focus groups. I followed an approach by Rubin and Rubin (2005), "As part of an iterative design, the researcher constructs theories of how and why things happen, doing so by combining separate themes in more detail and are asked both of the original conversational partners and of additional interviewees whose insights now seem relevant" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 56).

I did not use Nvivo to analyse the interview data, but focused more on the textural description of the conversations in combination with the bio-data information of the participant. I followed a similar process to the six-step one mentioned in 4.4.3, eliminating step two of creating cases, as each interview presented one case.

In step four, which was the step in which I summarised the transcription as an encounter, describing in detail how the questions were answered and what was shared, instead of looking at relationships between participants, I considered the flow of answers during the WhatsApp interview and the way the conversation with the participant felt to me.

4.4.5 Conclusion

Although the information generated from the interviews and focus groups was the result of a 'manufactured' interaction and was a "joint process consisting of the construction or reconstruction of people's experiences and understandings" (Heath, 2009, p. 88), I believe that the stories that were shared provided deep insight into the experiences of young people. As perceptions are unobservable, I utilised the hermeneutic circle in line with the approach taken by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), relying on the constant discursive relationship between myself and my sample. I acknowledge that no method

can guarantee a completely objective interpretation “as we are conditioned by prejudices of our own historical existence” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 9). However, interpretation has a dialogical character that is not purely subjective, and interpretation is constrained by the text (Gallagher, 1992, p. 10). The responses provided insight into the experiences of the young people, and my conversations allowed me to listen to their accounts of experiences they had after they had made sense of them (Heath, 2009, p. 88). I believe that through the conceptual framework and with the contextual setting in mind, my analytical approach shed light on the situated, tacit knowledge and subjective understandings of the young people’s experiences of transitions into and within TVET (Heath, 2009, p. 89). The findings of this analysis are presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 5. Young Saudis' narratives of TVET

The process of transitioning from school to work is characterised by choices and constraints that are complex and diverse. Examining the way young people navigate educational transitions within institutional pathways helps illuminate aspects of institutions and social structures that create both opportunities and disadvantages along the way. The variations in opportunities raise questions about how effective pathway structures are in allowing young people to choose specialisations and work that they aspire to. The limited literature related to the transition process in Saudi Arabia warranted a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding education and career decision-making (See Chapters One and Two). Throughout the interviews and focus groups with my participants diverse and complex narratives emerged. The diversity in the opinions of young people revealed details about the ways they envisioned the role of education in their lives and showed the complexity of navigating through the institutional pathways and the social structures. The analysis of these narratives is derived from discussion with young Saudi men and women in secondary school or enrolled in tertiary Saudi TVET institutes in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The students provided illustrative evidence about the experience of decision-making at different junctures throughout their education. The reasoning behind their views emerged in several narratives that illuminated some of the social and institutional characteristics that frame their experiences.

The data from focus groups and interviews sheds light on why young people attribute a marginalised status to TVET, alluding to the way that dominant opinions in society influence students' perceptions of TVET and shape their narratives. The data also raises questions about the nature of pathways in the Saudi education system, and the relationship between the availability of an opportunity and how it is perceived. Furthermore, the narratives raise questions about how social characteristics such as socioeconomic status, access to social networks and gender norms influence the way

young people formulate aspirations. As we shall see in the next two chapters, the opportunity structures (see Section 3.2) for young men and women in Saudi Arabia vary in some obvious ways, such as the fewer number of colleges and specialisations for women³⁰. However, embedded social norms provide additional layers of complexity, such as gender roles and expectations, and contribute to the way opportunities are perceived and pursued in less explicit, uniform or measurable ways.

This chapter will begin the data analysis by presenting young people's responses through the lens of emerging narratives about their education transitions, highlighting a variation in the way these transitions are experienced, and presenting reasons for these variations that will be further analysed in Chapter Six and Seven. The subsequent chapters will highlight the influence of gender, family, class and social networks on experiences. In this first of two analysis chapters the focus will be on the narratives that emerged from young people's experiences navigating through secondary and tertiary transitions. The remainder of this chapter will be divided into five main sections. In the first section, I will present an overview of the four main narratives that emerged from young Saudis' experiences of TVET, and sections 2-4 discuss each narratives in more depth, sharing illustrative excerpts from the data.

5.1 Young Saudis' narratives of TVET

Analysis of the participants' responses to questions about future aspirations for study and work uncover a predominantly negative view of TVET. When asked about future aspirations in the focus groups, young people only mention TVET on a few occasions as a pathway of choice. Most of the secondary students did not include TVET in their envisioned list of post-secondary pathways or career choices, and when asked by the

³⁰ There are 52 vocational colleges for men, and at the time of the study there were 32 for women. Additionally, there are 30 public universities, not all of which have female campuses, and within which many specialisations are only available to males.

facilitators about TVET most tended to pass the idea over or frame it in a negative light. Upon further investigation, however, it appeared that there was a lack of consensus about the meaning of TVET, and the narratives represented a spectrum of opinions and experiences.

Within my sample, only two of the tertiary students interviewed stated that they had applied to TVET voluntarily after secondary school. The majority of the young men stated that they had not gotten offers elsewhere. The young women, on the other hand, voluntarily applied to the vocational college, but most of them did so after completing a Bachelor's degree. Table 5-1 further illustrates the diverse experiences of young people in my sample:

Reasons for going into TVET	Number of Young women	Number of Young men
Total post-secondary students in TVET	11	34
Voluntarily enrolled in TVET directly out of secondary	0	2
Voluntary gap year/years	1	1
Completed Bachelor's	8	0
Willingly rejected other opportunity	0	4
Failed at another institute	1	9
Did not get accepted anywhere else	1	18

Table 5-1 Distribution of sample's TVET choices

Table 5-1 indicates that the majority of young people do not aspire to go to a vocational college directly out of secondary school, and those who do often do so after experiencing set-backs within the tertiary 'marketplace'.

Therefore, even if the technical and vocational colleges are not the first choice of students, the limited capacity within them further perpetuates unequal opportunities and access, and creates obstacles at the labour market level. Further to their unexpected

rejection from academic institutions of their choice, many of the students who were enrolled in technical colleges did not get their choice of specialisation.

Although the post-secondary and career aspirations of most young Saudis are high and academically driven, the limited availability of choices and centralised restrictions on access to different opportunities appears to be in contrast with these aspirations. When asked as part of focus group discussions about the post-secondary choices, students frequently mentioned 'studying', 'college' and 'university'. The words 'work' or 'jobs' were less frequently mentioned, perhaps indicating a taken for granted-ness young people attribute to the availability of post-secondary education. The source of this attitude can be attributed to many things, including their personal aspirations or those projected onto them along the transition pathway.

Table 5-2 and 5-3 present data from the career worksheet activities conducted during the focus groups. Most of the young men and women wanted to work for themselves. The young women's aspirations indicated the shifting nature of certain positions such as engineering and law, which were positions that had previously been dominated by men. Second to enterprising ventures, the young men aspired to work as engineers or pursue careers in the military. The majority of the young men believed that medicine was held to the highest esteem within society, followed by military and then engineering.

Aspiration	% (out of 56 students)
aspire to own their own business/small project	28%
aspire to work in medicine	17.9%
aspire to work in law	17.9%
aspire to work in engineering	12%
Aspire to work in education	10%
Aspire to work in an art related field	10%

Table 5-2 Career aspirations of young women

students attributed this to their own negligence in part, but cited systematic admissions barriers and the shortcomings of their teachers and counsellors complicit in their 'ending up' where they had. Students claimed that when their teachers provided guidance it tended to be on an ad-hoc and unstructured basis. For instance, Thamer (M, 23, COT student) recalls his interactions with a student counsellor³¹ in school:

I remember him dearly...every Thursday he would have an open day to guide students... 'Don't stay unemployed, even if it is 'free work', if you work selling fruit and vegetables, but being unemployed is destructive to a young person'

Additionally, and as discussed in Chapter Three, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2011) note that in absence of school careers guidance programs, decision-making occurs without 'official' guidance, and young people most likely base their choices on 'unofficial knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Secondary students therefore appeared motivated and encouraged by their parents, empowered by the fluidity of the comprehensive and open secondary system, and less concerned with their performance levels or the institutional barriers to pursuing their aspirations.

Despite the predominantly comprehensive nature of the secondary school system, the weaknesses in standardisation and the absence of objective and high quality careers guidance tends to cultivate risks that become apparent in subsequent selection processes. Chapter Three highlighted how symbolic value and the influences of social networks (Granovetter, 1973), influenced opinions, and young people's views were often based on the views of relatives and acquaintances and are related to other people's horizons for action. As we shall see, the data indicates that many students make seemingly myopic, short sighted decisions based on recommendations of trusted family members (Savelli, 2012), however, the way these trusted adults construct such

³¹ As mentioned in Chapter Two, the role of student counsellors was to provide emotional support rather than academic guidance.

recommendations is opaque at best. Many of the students are aware of restrictions on choice resulting from secondary school actions and decisions, but due to the openness of processes during schooling, the ramifications of their decisions do not seem to resonate. Experiences of transitions within the secondary system at the time of data collection are characterised by an openness and students are not restricted from accessing different options. While students did not typically map out their post-secondary plans, they believed that they would be able to successfully navigate through the institutional pathways to access their desired post-secondary destinations. This was apparent in many of the secondary focus groups when students were asked about their future careers, as illustrated by this exchange between Ilyas and his peers in an inner-city secondary school:

Facilitator³²: What are the jobs you aspire to after you graduate?

Yahya (17): public relations manager

Aws (17): petroleum and mineral engineering. Or human resources engineering.

Ashraf (16): A football player!

Hani (17): a petroleum engineer, if I make it. If I do not then I will do something in defence

Hamad (17): Mineral engineering

Jassim (17): petroleum

Ilyas (17): chemical engineering

Jaber (17): chemical engineering, I mean, petroleum

While there are no administrative barriers to choosing a course of action within the secondary pathway (See Section 2.7), convention states a hierarchy, where science is considered the best, followed by literature and finally, the vocational track. This is reflected in the way students understand the options as well, as Noura (F, 15, Private secondary) points out, “Hopefully I will pursue sciences because it’s better than

³² Where the participants are not introduced individually and in extended dialogues the ages of students are mentioned in parentheses.

humanities.” Students considered the science track to be challenging, the literature track to be for those who were good at memorizing information, and the vocational track was for those who were not bright enough for the others.

Furthermore, a hierarchy in qualifications is perpetuated socially, further enhancing the way young people make choices and view TVET opportunities. From the students’ point of view, university education abroad offers the best education, followed by local universities, followed by technical colleges that offer diplomas. The ranking is further influenced by the difficulty in specialisations (the more difficult, the more prestigious), which tends to be influenced by the location of the institute and the quality of the teaching staff. In a one-to-one interview, Thamer (M, 23, COT student) suggests that young people care about the way their qualification and status is regarded by others:

In gatherings people say, that guy [praise God] has a diploma... that guy has a Bachelor’s Degree... even in military rankings there is a difference, even in work and management, the one that is more qualified with a certificate gets a higher position.

This opinion is further illustrated by an exchange between two young women in the technical college's response to why Bachelor's Degrees were more highly regarded than diplomas:

Student 1: Because if there is something high or higher you have to go to the higher one, you should see who has graduated from university[...]society likes a Bachelor’s Degree.

Student 2: And the name, our society really focuses on the name [of the institute]... even with universities and their levels, if I compared between King Saud and King Faisal of course I would choose King Saud you know...

Gaps in information students had about access to resources and information about post-secondary opportunities are discussed openly in the focus groups. When asked about technical or vocational training, many of the secondary students in my sample had not heard of TVET and did not know exactly what it entailed. In one focus group, one secondary student claimed that since "we are in the age of technology, I lean toward

technical things" (Aws, M, 17), drawing a more direct link to technology rather than technical or vocational training. The students went on to discuss computer management, technology, new inventions and hacking as options for technical specialisations. The following exchange with secondary students from an affluent private secondary illustrates this further:

Facilitator: Ok boys, did you ever hear about vocational training?

Technical and vocational training?

Samer (15): No

Marwan (15): They try...

Nayef (16): Yes, they ... er

Facilitator: What do you know about them? Anyone else?

Samer (15): They wear blue uniforms, there is something blue?

Facilitator: Yes! Do you know what they offer? What specializations they train?

Fawaz (15): Where is it?

Muhannad (16): In Dammam, opposite the...

Marwan (15): What do they offer?

Samer (15): are they considered universities?

The exchange illustrates that even when prompted, these students were not sure what technical and vocational education is, how to access it, or what the function of the public technical college is. Only a minority within my sample were aware of the technical colleges as a post-secondary pathway. And while some were aware of the option of TVET within companies, the colleges were rarely mentioned.

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, participants describe their future selves as having successful careers, stable families and essential material possessions. These achievements were frequently listed as goals that fulfil their aspirations as well as the expectations society has of success. The young men and women cite a reputable job, a house, a car and marriage as the hallmarks of adulthood, but the overarching opinion is that pursuing a TVET route will limit or slow down their access to these goals. Throughout their descriptions of transition expectations and experiences, four main narratives emerged that will be explored further in the sections to follow:

- a. The narrative of TVET as a '**last resort**' route for people who failed to get into something else.
- b. The narrative of TVET as a '**career stopper**' that will limit future employment opportunities.
- c. The narrative of TVET as a '**second chance**' after experiencing barriers.
- d. The narrative of TVET as a '**welcome alternative**' to academic institutes.

The experiences of young people with educational transitions was not static and varied depending on several factors related to their individual circumstances and social positions. Some of the students began describing TVET as a 'last resort' for instance but changed their mind and began to view it as a 'second chance' for a variety of reasons. The overlap in the narratives adds a temporal dimension to the narratives, and they were dynamic and intersectional at times. This will be highlighted throughout the following section.

5.2 The last resort

As mentioned in 5.1, when considering their post-secondary opportunities, TVET is an area that is overlooked by most young people in my sample and viewed as the least preferred option. All of the participants expressed a desire to pursue post-secondary education, but most would either only apply to TVET institutes or accept an offer once they were rejected from other destinations. At some point during their description of TVET, almost all of the participants shared a view that TVET is second to academic education in status. They consider post-secondary pathways such as attending universities, applying for scholarships to study language or academic studies abroad or on-the-job training in prestigious companies before they think of public or private technical colleges or institutes. TVET was described as a forced opportunity and a last resort; "you may be obliged to resort to a technical college" (Faisal, M, 24, Private Technical Institute). The last resort narrative emerged through descriptions of encounters along the education-to-work pathway where young people chose TVET as a result of obstacles elsewhere, because they felt that they were running out of time, or

out of a fear of being stigmatised. Stigma was discussed frequently, and fuelled this narrative, as students appeared to be very concerned with the way educational institutes and specialisations are viewed externally.

Those who were enrolled in TVET institutes often described finding themselves there as a result of failing to gain access to other opportunities within the *training field* (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). TVET students were quick to point out the reasons why they 'ended up' in TVET, framed in language that indicated they could not succeed elsewhere. In Faisal's description of how he became a TVET student, he recalls that his initial perception of TVET was a deterrent for him:

I used to see a technician as something low/little. I used to say no I don't want to be a technician I want to be an engineer or something, or study for a Bachelor's Degree and stuff. (Faisal, M, 24, Private Technical Institute).

Most participants in my sample were striving for opportunities they believed were more appropriate for them, but had to settle for the technical college because they had made choices along their transition pathway related to secondary track or attainment that they viewed as 'irreversible'. One such factor is one's secondary achievement scores and GPA, as Nahar puts it, "This is the biggest reason that lead us to be forced to come here, a low GPA" (M, early 20s, COT student). Students recount their failed efforts to access a more desirable track, only to be disheartened that they must go into a technical college or otherwise expose themselves to future employment uncertainty. Hashim describes his commonplace experience:

I got accepted into the technical college but I didn't want the technical college I wanted something better, but if I hadn't come to the college I would be sitting around with nothing to do or occupy my time (M, 21, COT student).

The life experiences young people had once they reach the transition out of secondary indicate that their perception of the amount of available opportunities in academic

institutions and the labour market were exaggerated. Rami, a 19-year-old student in the public technical college studying to be a mechanic articulates this:

You assume that someone in the technical college is in the suitable place (for him), but there are things that forced us to come to places that we may not want, nor will we succeed in them even if we do want them, it has to do with opportunities and also restrictions that force you (Rami, M, 19, COT student).

Most students believe that circumstances from an earlier stage in their education leads to limited futures that could include TVET. These circumstances are attributed to a lack of guidance and advice from their family and teachers, with occasional confessions of negligence that led to poor academic attainment. When students found themselves with limited opportunities due to their grades or a rigid system, they eventually stopped exploring additional opportunities because Saudi tertiary institutes do not allow students to apply more than five years after graduating from secondary school (King Saud University (KSU), 2019). Students appeared to adopt a 'wait-and-see' approach and apply to programs of choice over several years. However, as Farid notes, this approach has an 'expiry date':

At a certain age you don't have the luxury of trying for more things, because, I'm over 24 and in about another year my high school diploma won't be accepted by universities. Universities will say we won't accept you or waitlist you (Farid, M, 24, Private Technical College).

The students accepted only a limited responsibility for running out of time, and instead recounted the shortcomings in school-to-work guidance throughout their schooling. Some students believed that their educational foundation in secondary set them up for what they believed was failure. Khalifa, for instance, explains that lack of guidance and an envisioned future beyond secondary drove this, "there wasn't guidance before, we were lost in secondary, and we were in a hurry, we just wanted to graduate and sit around" (Khalifa, M, 19, COT student). Rami (M, 19, COT student) was very candid

about his negligence in secondary school, but attributed his poor academic performance to a lack of guidance, and little follow up from teachers, allowing him to slack off. He had a kind of freedom to be idle through secondary, with little to no restrictions, and still pass. He discusses how this contributed to a mismatch of expectations and actual challenges, even in a college that he was not keen about to begin with:

Maybe when we were in secondary... we just wanted to graduate and leave, and they would give you grades, but then you would get into college and stuff, and I mean, when I got here it became very difficult to study, because in secondary everything was easy, you get by right away, but here, no, the grade you get on your exam is the one that is reported. (Rami, M, 19, COT student).

Rami's account of secondary school being 'easy' leads to many questions about his academic abilities, grading techniques and school pressures and requirements (See Section 2.5). His description of his experience in secondary indicates that his grades were negotiable, unlike the finality of grades in tertiary. Finally, in addition to opportunities and attainment, the students also believed that a predominant negative social perception will make it difficult to succeed in the training and employment field (See discussion in Section 3.2.1) (Bourdieu, 1977). The students refer to tensions between the college requirements, specializations, society and their own aspirations.

The participants' perception of what is better is mostly related to how society views TVET specializations. Difficult specializations that require many years of preparation and high attainment such as medicine and engineering are viewed positively, in contrast to specializations offered in technical colleges which are inevitably inferior if they are available to those with lower GPAs and can be obtained in fewer years. Latifa notes that society values a Bachelor's degree, and therefore, students often strive for programmes that are appreciated by others:

If there is something high you have to choose the higher one ...[people] say 'what are you doing you have a Bachelor's [Degree] and you're applying for a diploma', society likes Bachelor's [Degrees]. (Latifa, F, 25, COT student).

Bader on the other hand notes that “most people, if you tell them you study in the technical college they think you are a failure, or that it is not that great a place” (Bader, M, 19, COT student). The students feel that the view from the outside is negative, and many people think of technical colleges as the easier option, even if the students themselves disagree with this opinion. Rashed (M, 22, COT student) notes that no matter what he thinks, society will label him as a failure:

There’s a saying, they say that everything that is cheap must be poor quality, so they say if you can get in easily it must be simple, since the others have more GPA restrictions it must be better.

The way students describe others’ viewpoints of TVET signals that many fear it is impossible to overcome the associated stigma of going into a technical college. This narrative illustrates the rejection of TVET: the students would choose every opportunity presented to them over pursuing TVET. Younger students hoped for other options and believed they would be able to access them. Older students reminisced about their rejection of TVET in retrospect. The narrative reinforces the idea that education and training hold meanings that are contextually generated, both as a result of available opportunities as well as the social perception of those who pursue them.

5.3 The career-stopper

In discussions about navigating through educational transitions, the young men and women highlight the relationship between education and work, and the influence this has on their perceptions and choices. Hodkinson (2008) shows that decisions are not only related to internal dispositions, but also influenced by the local economy in which decisions are made. The narrative of TVET as a ‘career limiting’ choice is similar to the narrative of the ‘last resort’ one, but with a focus on the permanence of a career destination, and a resulting fear of uncertainty of unemployment or career stagnation. This narrative emerged from the sentiments of young men and women before or during TVET, articulating the uncertainty about the currency of their certifications and the opportunities and jobs available to a TVET certificate holder. Throughout focus group

discussions, many of the participants associated technical training with a limited and disappointing future employment outlook. Students who described TVET as a 'dead-end' or a career-stopper shared negative descriptions of the jobs associated with TVET certifications, and often believed that joining the labour market with a general secondary certification held better prospects than a tertiary TVET one (reflected in labour market statistics discussed in Section 2.4), or believed that pursuing TVET signalled failure to others.

Many students believed a certification in TVET would offer little social status and even fewer decent job opportunities. While a few TVET specializations were valued more than others, namely administration and different computing fields, students believed that there was a limited future in technical and vocational fields and that TVET meant that social status would be compromised and limited at best. Nabeel's opinion that "half the specializations have no future" is shared by several other students (Nabeel, M, 18, Secondary Industrial Institute). They wanted to maximise their future chances and felt that pursuing TVET meant that they would need to settle for a mediocre future with limited opportunities for growth, status and success. As Khalil notes "people think that general education has a better future, that the industrial institute has no future, you will graduate and stay home" (Khalil, M, 18, Secondary Industrial Institute). With this sentiment in mind, these students considered testing their chances in the labour market, which they believed may provide a wider range of future opportunities rather than limit their prospects by enrolling in TVET.

The status of some specialisations is considered so exceptionally objectionable that students explained instances where they avoided job or training offers by coveted and reputable companies if they had a chance to pursue a more prestigious specialisation in a less reputable company. If 'forced' into TVET, they hope to soften the blow by choosing specialisations that they believe to have relatively higher social status and reject other specializations completely. The narrative highlights the way certain specializations carry connotations that the participants believed were detrimental to their

future. Fayez, for instance, notes that his training in the private technical institute he attended was sponsored by a coveted multinational company that would employ him upon graduation, but he quit the position and opted for a less reputable and more volatile local company in order to avoid becoming a welder: “I got a job in a [local company] as a mechanic, and I accepted it and I had to leave the [multinational company] because of the welding position.” (Fayez, M, 24, Private Technical Institute). This is further stressed by another male student in his early 20s in a private technical college:

Social perceptions about a job...it has to be a government job. Sometimes if someone is a mechanic or an electrician or something they look at them as a ‘small level’, and if they are in government or in a higher level they look at them differently, or if they are a doctor or, or...

Furthermore, students think of TVET specializations as areas that can be pursued as a hobby or “maybe something on the side” (Nawal, F, 16, Public Secondary), but not something that needs to be studied for and specialised in. The work opportunities available to the students if they pursued these specialisations were often considered to be outside their ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996)(See Section 3.3).

Many of the decisions that young people made were motivated by perceived future opportunities in the labour market. Some students considered working after they had completed secondary school as a more attractive position to TVET (a trend reinforced by labour entry statistics presented in Chapter Two) as this would allow them to assume administrative positions that required little training but appeared to be more socially prestigious. Rami (M, 19, COT student), who was mentioned earlier as being in a hurry to graduate from secondary recalled that the COT was the only place that accepted him amongst many universities and institutes. He initially attended some courses before leaving to find work:

I wasn’t thinking about the level of education, and I didn’t understand what education is in general, what I was thinking was that everyone

said that you would get your [vocational] certification and end up staying home, use your secondary diploma to get a job now.

The fear that the vocational college certification had little currency in the labour market was echoed by many students. They believed that they may not achieve future goals just because they were enrolled in TVET, or because TVET was the only thing they could access. One young man in his early 20s in a private college explains that in his view, the acceptance of a vocational position signals that the applicant was not able to get a better position elsewhere, “If you seek alternative jobs [to Aramco or Sabic]³³ you will be 40 years old and not even making 12,000 or 10,000 riyals³⁴... because they are aware that Aramco and Sabic did not hire you”. The admission that you did not qualify for something more prestigious appears to make the students fear that they will not grow in their occupations or climb the corporate ladders, “Your acceptance of a specialization shows whether you are prepared to study it and work in it or not”. (Alaa, M, 24, Private technical college). This sentiment indicates that students not only described TVET as something negative, but they also view it as deterministic.

The negative and deterministic perceptions of available TVET opportunities led students to belittle the value of their educational opportunity, even if they found it enjoyable or enriching. As Alaa notes, if you are prepared to work in fields that are looked down upon, you may end up trapping yourself in that position:

Just the idea that you have accepted it or not, I mean, there are people that see pipefitting as a specialization that is not all that, or welding. [They would say] ‘what, I’m going to be a welder you mean? I will graduate to become a welder?’

³³ See Section 2.4.

³⁴ Average monthly wages for Saudi citizens is 10,292 Saudi Riyals. For young people (15-24) this ranges between 5,400 and 6,400 Saudi Riyals. The average increases to 13,700 Saudi Riyals for those aged 50-54. For diploma holders (all ages) the average monthly salary is 9,999 Saudi Riyals (GaStat, 2019b).

Alaa expresses how the worry of being labelled in a negative way just for accepting a position in certain technical or industrial fields acts as a deterrent to pursue TVET. That there is little knowledge within society about the specializations is frustrating to him as well as others and leads many students to shy away from opportunities which they believe are limiting.

Young people share their fears about not achieving the necessary markers of a successful adult, and share work-arounds to this fatalistic destiny, such as by choosing the 'best of the worst' specializations within TVET or by entering the labour market directly out of secondary. These strategies contribute to the 'career-stopper' narrative, which provides a partial explanation for why TVET status is painted negatively. However, other students do not seem to describe TVET as a cliff that will lead to failure, and instead highlight the value in TVET, often because of failures in other life experiences. Diverse experiences and social characteristics can offer students with fewer post-secondary options a 'second chance' at education and more desirable future employment opportunities.

5.4 The second chance

Some of the students who had encountered challenges while navigating their school-to-work transitions described TVET as a place for second chances. While this narrative began similarly to the 'last resort' one, other circumstances and 'turning points' (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996) led students to develop a newfound appreciation for TVET. This narrative emerged through analysing discussions with students that were enrolled in TVET institutes, and was most often framed as a juxtaposed view of perception versus reality. Many of these students had already experienced set-backs in their transition pathways and were able to put those experiences into perspective. Franceschelli and Keating (2018) found that for some young people who encountered set-backs that led them to contemplate a dissonance between their own optimism and a less positive reality early in their life served as a

means to put things into perspective and look towards a better future. The narrative of second-chance was dominated by a sentiment that the negative status of TVET was unfairly attributed to the related fields by a society and labour market that did not understand it or realise its value. Viewing TVET as a second chance did not always mean that they had a preference for technical and vocational specialisations, but their circumstances led them to believe that without this chance they would be worse off despite the predominant negative character that society attributes to TVET. The 'second chance' narrative emerged in the descriptions of TVET in those who saw a means to job progression or advancement.

Secondary students viewed TVET as a pathway to future education and employment opportunities if they struggled to meet attainment requirements in the general secondary track. The concept of increased opportunity and access was the same for the few students that were enrolled in the secondary industrial institutes and for many that were in technical colleges. Many of the students who were enrolled in TVET at secondary and tertiary level reported low academic achievement as a reason for finding themselves in TVET. Hatem (M, 19, Secondary Industrial Institute) expresses the opinion that when a secondary student's academic attainment prevents him from pursuing general secondary education, TVET can be considered more fitting, "My GPA was low, I couldn't finish secondary because this is my [performance] level, if I finished I would [fail]...but this way I can work". Hatem had moved homes several times and was challenged by a variety of family set-backs and a lack of support at home. He described the secondary industrial institute as a place where he could get a second chance at completing secondary school with more attractive performance levels for later employment. Haitham (Haitham, M, 16, secondary industrial institute) reinforces this view, explaining that the type of instruction satisfies his needs as a student:

I like to work manually, I don't like to sit in the same class and study the whole time, I get nervous, that's why I came to the industrial

institute...I left general secondary so I would graduate because it was hard, it was very different.

Haitham says he was challenged by subjects such as physics and chemistry, and both subjects were required during the foundation year of general secondary. Even if Haitham chose a literature track to avoid these, he believed that having to sit exams in physics and chemistry would lead to low attainment that would affect subsequent years, and that his grade average would then limit his access to future opportunities. Going into a secondary industrial institute meant that he would increase his chance of accessing tertiary education in a technical college. The subjects in secondary industrial institutes were taught to a lower level, and meant that those who struggled academically were more likely to pass.

Similarly, the students who were enrolled in TVET at the tertiary level viewed it as a second chance at increasing their skills and employability. Many of them experienced rejections at other institutes or by employers. This highlights the fluid nature of narratives and the way that turning points change and fluctuate as time passes and opportunities shift. Some students I interviewed transitioned out of secondary directly into employment, only to pursue a tertiary TVET certification later. Since they were unable to access university education (mainly due to their secondary attainment levels), they came to see TVET as a route that offered them a second chance at a post-secondary education that they had developed a newfound value for. Saud (M, 22, COT student) discusses his experience in leaving the technical college after one semester to find employment. Saud was one of the first in his family and circle of friends to enrol in a post-secondary course, and he reluctantly enrolled in the college then quickly and voluntarily dropped out to take a job at a call centre. Two years into his job Saud decided to go back to the college because he felt that “a job without a certification is not worth anything”. He re-entered the technical college to broaden his future choices, “I want to get my certification so that I can get the job that I have in mind, not the one that just accepts me”. Saud believed that the certification would open more employment and job

progression doors for him. His experience in the labour market helped him realise a value to post-secondary training. He regretted leaving the college and believed the choice had limited his opportunities within the employment field. Saud believed TVET was a pathway to a second chance at finding more meaningful employment. Fahad (M, 26, Private technical college) provides another illustrative example of this perception,

I was employed in an administration job for three years, and I realised that my secondary certificate at this time isn't enough. My preferences were for steel and welding and stuff like that. I had a friend that studied here [at this institute]. He advised me to come, and I left my administrative job and applied here. I risked my salary and I risked the distance, but I said it's in order to develop (I come from a different city) but now I am settled here. I risked my salary and my job. It was a very comfortable job, but I didn't see any development. One has to develop in something that they love and that society needs, so you have to risk something...

TVET institutes provided an opportunity for students who changed their mind about their choice of employment or education to increase their mobility and job progression, or pursue something different, which otherwise would not be possible. As presented in Chapter Two, rigid admissions requirements and restrictions often made it difficult for students to change their minds or go back into education once certain choices were made. TVET has been described as one area where more choices are available for exploration or change. Mubarak, a 28-year-old married father, for instance, began his career in an administrative role in the military sector and realised that he would not progress in that industry. He later pursued an entry level position in an industrial company because he knew he would have the opportunity to be trained on the job. He believed that the training would provide him with a better future for his family. Mubarak expressed regret in the time he lost and great hope in his future in the technical field:

I see that the industrial sector, the technical one, its future job opportunities will be comfortable because there isn't a company that works without them, all companies need production for instance, they

all need welding, every company needs electrical, so there are many opportunities. (M, 28, private technical college).

Ihsan (M, 21, private technical college), who joined his father's company directly out of secondary, describes his choice to go back into further education:

Before I came to the institute my father rejected the idea of studying he wanted me to go into business and entrepreneurial work and would say that there is no point of studying, it was his opinion, so I worked with him, he has a company and I worked with him for about a year but I felt that there was no future, and what if the company failed, I wouldn't have a certification or anything to secure my future and so I went into the institute after that.

Upon completing his studies, Ihsan planned to continue working with his father, but believed that with a certification he would be able to help the business grow and develop and would have more confidence in his abilities, while at the same time opening opportunities for him to pursue something else in the future.

Students framed TVET as a second chance when they develop a newfound appreciation for TVET after experiencing it and finding it more in line with their idea of learning. These students may not have considered TVET otherwise and enter TVET reluctantly by recommendation of trusted relatives or friends, bringing with them low expectations. They talked about society's nickname for technical colleges as: 'the parental satisfaction college', meaning that going to the college will make parents happy that their children are not sitting at home without a valuable contribution to the household. To illustrate this idea, Nasser (M, 20, CoT student) also discusses how his view changed once he enrolled:

People outside the college, friends would say it is the parental satisfaction college, to make your mom and dad happy, they put that idea out there. I got here, and wasn't very comfortable with my specialization. But when I started studying I figured that what they say outside the college, it's for people that have heard it from others not from people that have studied here. But once you study... I mean now I know a lot and I used to have a really negative view.

Once enrolled in TVET many students find that they held misconceptions about the training and had wished they had known about it previously. They are often surprised by the quality of education they get and are easily socialised into their new fields. As long as they are able to envision a future that exceeds their expectations of their future without a TVET certification, many young people describe TVET as a welcome alternative rather than a last resort or a career stopper. Rakan (M, 22, COT student), for instance, discusses the demand for TVET jobs in the labour market, and how pursuing TVET would translate into increased opportunities, “society has a demand, now you find that someone that graduates from the teacher’s college won’t get a job but someone who graduates from the industrial college gets one”. Rami goes on to describe the appreciation he developed for the technical college once he understood more about it:

The society’s perception it made you feel that it’s (bad) but when we got here we found out that even the certification is strong, but we used to think based on what people say that it’s (normal) even if you get a certification it won’t do much for you, it won’t be like a strong diploma, but when you ask about it and study here, it’s the contrary, you know it’s a strong certification. It may be the best tech college to get a diploma from. (Rami, M, 19, COT student)

Faisal (M, 24, Private Technical Institute) reinforces this view by describing his appreciation for his specialisation, and his new understanding of its value in the labour market:

But after I came I saw that a technician is an important job, very important, in companies, even engineers in companies depend on technicians in a big way, I mean, I asked people in the company I’m going to join and I know people there I asked them they said no, don’t think a technician is something simple, we engineers depend on technicians in a big way.

Students who were faced with disappointments or struggled to progress along initial chosen pathways found that TVET offered them a second chance at education and employment. This narrative emerged in discussions with participants that did not aspire

to TVET at first, and began with negative descriptions of TVET, but they changed their perceptions as they encountered more experiences within the education and employment field. The young men and women who appreciated TVET as a second chance mostly experienced 'contradictory' periods of routine (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996) (see Section 3.3), where their experience undermined an original decision and they realise their dislike for a previous choice. However, other young people's life experiences shaped their opinions in a different way, leading them to welcome and advocate for TVET and describe it as a first choice.

5.5 The welcome alternative

Some students in my sample had an appreciation for the teaching style in TVET institutes, the specialisations offered, or had positive experiences of TVET, or a combination of these factors. The narrative of 'welcome alternative' emerged in the accounts of a small minority where TVET fell well within their view of what was acceptable and desirable and was preferred to either general secondary or universities. Some students saw TVET institutes as places where their personal strengths were more recognised. Advocates for TVET would often highlight the respect and patience that they got in technical training settings:

The teachers' treatment of and attention to students makes them perform their duties more than they have to, they teach us the curriculum and they present things to us in any way so we can understand as much as possible. (Baraa, M, 16, secondary industrial institute).

Similarly, Abdulaziz (M, 22, secondary industrial institute) appreciates the different educational experience offered in the TVET institute available to him:

They said if you don't want to go to secondary then come here and study you will benefit from the certification, which is experience and a secondary certification you benefit from them because they are one, and thanks to God I mean, I'm comfortable and my situation is OK.

Abdulaziz goes on to explain that in the secondary industrial institute, students take the same classes as general secondary school, but in a different format that they prefer. Some of the students I interviewed chose the TVET route because of the specific specializations they wanted to pursue, sometimes to enhance family businesses, a point that will be discussed further in Chapter Six. While this was a minority within the sample, the students who felt this way were able to articulate their optimism about TVET. Hisham notes that “ever since I was in intermediate school I planned to come here, I didn’t want general secondary” (Hisham, M, 18, secondary industrial institute). Similarly, Hashim (M, 21, COT student) explains that the vocational college was the only place that would allow him to continue education in a field he was passionate about:

Since beginning secondary I worked in a phone shop and I like electronics so I started looking and they said in the college you can specialise in technical assistance and computer so it is close to that so I said ok let me go there I didn’t even apply to universities or other colleges.

The following interaction between Tammam (M, 17, secondary industrial institute) and the focus group facilitator illustrates the pursuit of TVET as a welcome choice:

Tammam: My brother sat with me and said go into car mechanics, we have a garage, so he said do cars. You can do maintenance all the time, and every year there are new cars and this would be a project, car mechanics, to open a garage and it will be a successful business for the future

Facilitator: So he advised you or forced you?

Tammam: It was a recommendation, I was in welding, he said go to mechanics because I have a brother that is in a garage and he was in mechanical and production, and he makes good income.

Other student: He says that mechanical is tiring, but it is not, if you love a craft, lifting and stuff, then it won’t be tiring. It’s just about moving it’s energizing and you benefit.

Saeed also expressed a passion for his specialization and was intentionally in the technical college to enhance his skill and perfect his craft:

“Because of the networks specialization, I mean, I looked around, and whenever I looked anywhere else the specializations were either medicine or... engineering, but here there was networks” (Saeed, M, COT student)

Finally, some students were advocates for TVET not necessarily due to being previously rejected elsewhere, but due to their experience of TVET. This narrative emerged strongly in young women’s discussions of TVET, and those enrolled in TVET described it within a positive light, a point that will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven. As we have seen, those who described TVET as a last resort often attributed this to their understanding of TVET through a negative social lens. First hand experiences of TVET often led to a different, more positive perspective, sometimes set against a previous negative experience, but not always borne out of rejection. Latifa expresses her appreciation for TVET as a site that has given her more confidence and where she felt more appreciated:

When I first enrolled I wasn’t excited, but now when I tell them that the studying is wonderful, they focus on the skills that you get, there are (smaller classes). In university the class has 50 or 70 (students) here... it’s much less, in the 20s I think, so there is a lot of focus. (Latifa, F, 25, COT student).

While the majority of my sample described TVET negatively, this group of students deliberately enrolled in TVET and welcomed a future shaped by this choice. These students had experiences in their lives in which they were exposed to TVET specializations which appeared to influence their appreciation for the fields. While the reasons for this perception were varied, the majority of the students advocated for TVET for reasons that were related to how TVET made them feel more valued, and how contrary to dominant societal perception, the experience of TVET was positive and encouraging.

5.6 Conclusion

The experiences of participants presented in this section illustrate the diverse opinions young Saudis hold of TVET, alluding to the different motivations and factors that influence TVET aspirations and perceptions. While many young people described TVET as a last resort and an option that would limit their future opportunities, their definition of TVET was not always clear. The status of TVET in Saudi Arabia is complex, and influenced by external factors that were not directly related to the inherent nature of TVET, but indicative of its place within the prevailing institutional and social structures. The link between the purpose of education as a means to employment that dominates the policy narrative presented in Chapter One and Two further exacerbated negative sentiment of TVET because of the kind of work they associate with vocational education. However, increased exposure along the education-to-work pathway tended to influence the way TVET was perceived by some. This raises questions about what influences perceptions and opinions of TVET, and how this goes on to shape the way young people navigate through the available pathways. Are these pathways available to everyone? Why or why not? The next chapter will shed light on the way social institutions shape opportunities along the transition pathway, highlighting some of the reasons behind the emergence of these narratives.

Chapter 6. **Social and structural influences underlying TVET perceptions**

The way that agency and choice manifest themselves within the highly structured institutional education transition pathway can be better understood through the ways young people make choices in light of their social characteristics and positions. Examining the various options of those with different social backgrounds and characteristics highlights the complexity of the transition landscape in Saudi Arabia and the ways institutions can fail to address inequalities, systematically reducing opportunities for some, and enhancing them for others. The previous chapter highlighted individual perceptions of young people. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the way access to financial resources, family relationships, social networks, and gender shape transition experiences differently within the institutional pathways discussed in Chapter Two. These social factors act together and intersect with one another, influencing the way young people navigate their opportunities. Separating out the social factors allows for an analysis of the degree to which different social structures influence choice.

The first section of this chapter will look at the influence relationships have on choice and access to education and career guidance, highlighting the role of family and social networks. The second section will look at the effects of financial resources, and finally, the third section will explore the influence of gender on perceptions of education opportunities and choice.

6.1 Social relationships

The historical context within which young people are making education and work decisions generates the vocabulary that the participants used to describe their aspirations and their expectations. In Saudi Arabia the family extends beyond the nuclear to include grandparents, aunts and uncles and often the broader cousin network. Elder family members are looked up to and seen as trusted and informed individuals (See

Section 2.2). Decisions tend to include everyone in the family, and individuals draw on the relationships and social capital that different family members have access to in order to navigate barriers. In addition to age, family members who have more wealth or income tend to be more influential, as their social networks can be wider, and they can afford to access resources that will enhance young people's chances of pursuing pathways that are otherwise blocked.

6.1.1 The influence of family

The family unit is arguably the most prominent social institution that affects young people's education and work transitions and aspirations in Saudi Arabia. The influence of family permeates decision-making at every level, and it is at the intersection of family with the other social characteristics such as gender, social networks and financial resources that the patterns of decision-making become clearer. Family and community values effect individual aspirations as well as their ability to make choices (See Sections 2.2 and 2.3). The aspirations of parents strongly influence the way young people conceptualise and pursue their future careers. The dominating patriarchal family structure is a feature of society denoting that young women and men both answer to the male patriarch of the family (See Section 3.2.3). When asked about post-secondary career planning, students overwhelmingly believed that parents should and do play a prominent role in this transition. Fathers often make the decisions for the students with little input from them. This is sometimes described as advice and care, and so many students express trust in the suggestions and follow the recommendations. Other times, it is described less as a recommendation and more of a command. This interview with Nasser (M, 20, Public secondary) shows how fathers may push young people into roles they are reluctant to go into, which does not always turn out the way any of the two parties expected:

Facilitator: Perhaps you didn't like your specialization?

Nasser: Yes honestly but my problem is that I said I would work hard... because my father would say the best specialization is accounting every [company] will accept you and stuff like that

Facilitator: What was his reaction when you left the college? Did he say something? Advice, a lecture?

Nasser: My father was angry with me

Facilitator: did you have aspirations other than accounting? Did you envision yourself in a particular job or specific rank? When you were younger was there a dream in your mind?

Nasser: I wished I could be in the military

Facilitator: And why didn't you apply to the military college?

Nasser: they didn't accept me. My GPA was low

Nasser previously applied to a university and a Royal Commission College but did not get in due to his low GPA. Most young Saudis depend on family members for guidance and advice, and even for making decisions for them (See Chapter Five). Nearly all of the participants listed anecdotal evidence as more valuable, and they referred to friends and family members throughout our discussions as evidence as to why they make certain choices over others. These choices are a result of trusting relationships rather than experience or expertise.

Financial resources can sometimes compensate for the lack of career guidance in the school system, as well as the lack of expertise of trusted relatives and friends. Young people from more affluent backgrounds can access additional information and guidance resources, giving them a degree of independence and negotiation power in their transition decisions. The following exchange between secondary young men in an inner-city public school illustrates the way in which many students follow the recommendations of family, even if it doesn't always match their own opinions:

- Yousef** (15)³⁵: I want to be an airplane technician and my family want me to be an engineer
- Adib** (15): I want to be a football player but my father wants something else.. medicine or engineering or business
- Yamen** (16): [I want to be] Like, my own business or a developer or something, but my dad wants something else like information technology or business or something
- Ibrahim** (16): I want mechanical engineering but my family say a different kind of engineering like civil engineering, or any other type of engineering other than mechanical
- Amjad** (17): I want to go into military or the Ministry of Interior but my family wants me to go into medicine, but I don't think I would succeed in those things
- Adib** (15): With football they say what if you get injured, you'd sit around, but if you have a job or a certification you could work your whole life, until you die
- Yousef** (15): I said I wanted to be an airplane tech and they won't allow it... that's it
- Bander** (17): I want to be a mechanical engineer but they want me to be a civil engineer or something, I say I want to be like my dad, a mechanical engineer and they say no, my dad says look for something better
- Amjad**: All of my family is in the military or something like that, they say don't think about military at all, you will succeed in your studies, I said I know, but I don't want to study, I will go into the military, I think that's what's best for me and they say no, you cant
- Hussam** (16): My family are fine, they say whatever you want, I am prepared to let you learn anything but the most important thing is you work hard on your studies and when you finish, I'm responsible for your college, I will be responsible for you, and my father advises me on everything and says, for instance, go

³⁵ When the students are not introduced individually, or when there are several mentioned at a time, their ages are listed in parentheses for reference.

into something you will find a job in, there are a lot of fields you can study for and then not find a job in.

Financial resources can also be used to circumvent failure to access public university.

Fahad (M, 26, Private technical college) who was not admitted to a public university, discusses the approach his family took to ensure he pursued a specialisation that they wanted him to pursue:

Fahad: I mean sometimes family are a problem. They come and tell you to study a specific thing because in their view it is better... when I first graduated I didn't have an opportunity to study in university and my family's desire was for me to go to a medical school. So my father enrolled me in a private medical college and he paid more than 100,000 Saudi Riyals. I lost two years of my life and the plan didn't succeed.

Facilitator: Did you not like medicine from the beginning?

Fahad: I liked it but I didn't get another opportunity and the institute I studied in wasn't equipped to teach medical fields, no labs or staff or anything. It was a scam.

The private tertiary field is new and under-regulated, leading to a serious mistrust of the system, and in Fahad's case, for obvious reasons (See Section Two). Fahad's experience echoes others' experiences of navigating through a private tertiary education field that hopes to capture students who have financial resources but do not have the educational attainment requirements to get into public universities. Students relayed experiences of accessing institutes that were not properly licensed, in pursuit of an educational track that they believed would be worth more in the labour market, illustrating their own determination as well as their families', and their continued desire to access opportunities that they were denied by the public tertiary system's limitations. This illustrates the way financial resources do not always solve dilemmas related to transitions. The outcome for Fahad, and many others, was a loss of financial resources combined with a lack of certification.

Because the source for most of post-secondary planning and guidance was usually parents or trusted relatives who tend to push students toward certain specialisations, understanding the relatives' deliberative reasoning is equally as important as the students'. When asked about his choice between an international program in his private secondary, or the traditional national track, Muhannad describes his father's influence:

He told me to do that. Because my grades were not excellent. So he advised me to work hard... well, he gave me the decision, if I wanted to go to (the national track), so I told him I'll enrol in (the national track) to get better results. (Muhannad, M, 16, private secondary student).

Muhannad appears to have had little contribution to the choice of his secondary track, and his choice was the same as his father's. Throughout the discussions the students often claim they relied on their parents and believed that parents were responsible for providing career guidance and advice, as Shorouq notes when asked who is responsible to offer guidance: "My father...he always guides me and aspires that I do better, and maybe he is the reason I put in more effort." (Shorouq, F, 16, private secondary student). Shorouq also appears to leave the deliberation to her father rather than actively engage in the decision-making process. However, reliance on unofficial information often led to poorly calculated decisions that would be apparent in the transitions out of secondary, a realization many of the older students articulated more succinctly. Mubarak (M, 28, Private TVET Institute) and his colleagues remember their time in secondary school with the benefit of hindsight:

Facilitator: And did you think before you chose the literature track, what employment opportunities were available or not?

All students: No/laughing/that's impossible!

Mubarak (28) : We used to look for the easiest anyway...literature has less science subjects...In high school that choice doesn't represent a person's preferences...

Within the family, references to gender revealed how the influence of family could facilitate or limit young people's ability to pursue choices (to be discussed in 6.3). For

example, Arwa explained how her mother wanted her to go to university so that she could boast about this accomplishment to her friends. Additionally, many of the young women discussed future opportunities in light of what their family would 'allow' and described the importance of family approval. Hayat (F, 15, private secondary student) describes the contrast between her sister and brothers' experiences of post-secondary choices:

It was hard for my siblings, too, for instance, my sister. For my brother, no, it was fine. But my sister wanted to study design but everyone said to her what would you want to do later, there isn't anywhere where you could work and stuff. So she went into finance because at least she knows how she will work and apply her knowledge afterwards.

Raya (F, 16, public secondary) also notes the determining role of parents, "they put obstacles in my way to force me to change my mind."

These opinions are further projected onto ideas of responsibilities after marriage in the future. Ghala (F, 16, private secondary student) explains that "if my parents tell me to stay home I wouldn't, but if my husband did I would". Nawal (F, 16, public secondary) further expresses this opinion, insisting that restrictions were social, not structural, a sentiment echoed throughout focus group discussions:

Nawal (16): They used to say that women don't have rights, but now, no, they see that women have all their rights in Saudi Arabia.

Facilitator: Do you agree? That women have all their rights

Manar (16): I see that

Nawal (16): Now it is only her family that can deter her, I don't feel that the country is oppressing her

Nawal's perception of opportunity separates barriers driven by the structure of the education system from social barriers in the form of gendered norms and stereotypes. The decisions of young women, like young men, were highly dependent on the advice of family members, parents and guardians, and young women are very open about the ultimate say that their parents and husbands have in their choices. While young men tended to allow their parents to decide for them, as discussed above, young women also actively deferred their decision-making to their parents and guardians. They

also discussed the opinion of their husband as a decision-maker and influencer on their choice, often in more authoritative tones than the ones young men used to articulate the involvement of their parents in their decision-making.

Najwa (F, 16, Public secondary) expresses the importance of following a guardian's advice, in light of her understanding of a women's role in society:

I don't think it's a 100% wrong [to follow your husband's advice] because maybe it's true the husband has the right.. how is it that she is not at home, and most of the time too, so who will take care of the house? At the same time, I think that a girl must get what she wants.

While many young women valued their role as carers within the family, some appeared more conflicted in the way they envisioned this, as they also valued a life where they could make choices and were worried they could not have both. Some young women felt that they would not like to get married at all in fear of their decision-making power being taken away, similar to Nada's feelings, discussed in section 6.3.

6.1.2 The influence of social networks

Although institutional transition pathways are apparently designed to allow for equal opportunity based on merit and performance, Reay, David and Ball (2005) have shown that social and cultural characteristics act to limit aspirations by pushing young people down pathways that are seemingly pre-determined. In the case of Saudi Arabia students are pressured to meet certain social indicators of success that include academic achievement, employment and marriage. When faced with difficulty in achieving these, students often utilise any resource at their disposal, especially social relationships that can help overcome obstacles. In line with Granovetter's arguments about the power of social networks (1973), Harrison and Waller (2018) argue that the value placed on achievements by young people tends to be shaped by the expectations of adults in their social networks. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996) highlight the way social capital shapes the perceptions young people hold of success and achievement in the form of horizons for action. These horizons influence the internalised concepts around the types of

education transition choices young people should pursue and shape their desire to pursue those opportunities, despite the social and cultural norms that affect some students more than others. These arguments help illuminate the way participants approached the education transition planning process and the way they formulated their career aspirations in light of the social connections that they had access to. These concepts have been useful in making sense of the experiences of my participants, despite differences in context. The experiences further highlight the way that context can illuminate the impact on young people when they lack the right kinds of social and cultural capital and illuminate the implications of adult expectations on the decisions of young people.

Social networks in Saudi Arabia, discussed in Chapter Two and Three, are related to kinship ties, tribal allegiances, traditional mode of living (nomadic versus settled) and religious affiliations. Membership in a social network gives students a sense of security and confidence in their future well-being. Social networks can provide a safety net to capture those who fall outside of the institutional measures of success at minimum, but also provide access to employment and education opportunities in best-case-scenarios. If students are not successful in school or employment, the safety net can be as simple as financial support and a place to live for life. However, the more successful and goal-oriented young people are, the more sophisticated the support from social networks can be. Most participants who claim to belong to a strong social network tend to have more confidence in their ability to circumnavigate obstacles within education transition pathways. For instance, Amjad (M, 15, public secondary) planned to go into the military upon graduating secondary school because “my whole family and social network is in it”. This was something Amjad aspired to because he believed that being amongst his extended family members would add value to his status, further highlighting the varying perceptions of the participants.

Family background played a role in the way future opportunities were framed. As discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, historical patterns of work and tribal legacy tend to

persist in the way that jobs are viewed by different people. While this was not explored in depth, the evidence suggests that there is a relationship between attitude toward work and geographical location of family origin, tribal affiliation and previous work. This was particularly apparent with students who wanted to join the military, as they claimed that they had connections that could allow them to pursue higher rankings. There are a range of career opportunities that lie within the family's view of what is desired and what is acceptable. Youth rarely pursue opportunities outside this range, internalising family aspirations. Amjad (M, 17, Public Secondary) describes how his ambitions are aligned with his family's, despite the family's desire for him to pursue something different:

All of my family is in the military or something like that, they say don't think about military at all, you will succeed in your studies, I said I know, but I don't want to study, I will go into the military, I think that's what's best for me and they say no, you can't.

Social networks give students access to opportunities, often in the form of a *wasta* (See Section 2.3); a relationship with a person who will act as a mediator to facilitate access to a good or service by utilizing his/her social relationships. A *wasta* can be a relation in an administrative position who can process applications outside of the official regulations, favouring some students over others, or it can come in the form of instructions to an administrator from a *wasta* in a more influential managerial position. In each case, 'knowing the right people' can be the difference between getting an opportunity or not. Khalifa (M, 19, Public Technical College) explains that he came to the TVET college because he had the support of his uncle:

My uncle worked in the technical college, and he said come to the technical college and he gave me the best specialization at that time that would help me in my future, and I came based on his recommendation.

Wastas are discussed widely throughout interviews and focus groups, and while they are not always seen as positive, most students highlight the benefits of having a *wasta*.

Students tend to believe that having the right social connections will provide opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable, as Saud (M, 22, COT student) explains:

A *wasta* sends you on a scholarship to study abroad, I know a guy who got a scholarship abroad with a *wasta*, and he isn't academic or anything, not even a good grade in the standardised test, he got 60 or 65 and now he studies abroad.

When asked whether he believed he would get a job upon graduating from the VET college, one student from a small public technical college explained that "I personally think I will get a job, because I have social relationships."

The widespread use of *wastas* also created a sense of scepticism amongst participants about abilities and qualifications. This view was most prevalent with those who had weak social connections or lacked a *wasta* altogether, contributing to the fatalistic view of 'ending up' in certain education routes as a last resort after not finding opportunities elsewhere. Even those who did not have a positive view of a *wasta* tended to acknowledge its importance in society and admit to the benefits of the *wasta* system. Participants who lacked access to a strong social network were much less sure of their future, their opportunities, or their ability to succeed, and resented the way social relationships appear to trump individual merit. Zaina (F, 15 public secondary student) describes her opinion of *wastas*:

...if [a girl] says to someone, 'I study in the best university in Saudi' then 90% of people will respond with 'long live the *wasta*', and only 10% would say, 'wow this is testimony to your efforts'. Because now that is what the norm is. The society has allowed itself to get to this stage.

The participants who did not have a *wasta* described the way *wastas* offered a gateway to certain opportunities, explaining how "a signature can help you out" or that the

opportunities they wished for were only possible with “vitamin W”³⁶. The TVET students that did not have *wastas* believed they were therefore trapped in TVET in general, or in a specialization within TVET that they did not choose. In one focus group discussion, a student described his experience working in a private company without a university certification, and his peers pointed out that he could find alternative means to excel:

Student 1: I had totally dismissed the idea of going back into education. But I found that people such as my supervisor, my manager, the management as a whole, and the general manger, in all the branches...all of them talk about education, and all ask to get further courses and training. So I learned then, that no matter what I may [achieve] in the job, I need to go back to the very first foundation, which is education. Without education, I will not succeed. To gain a promotion you need education. Salary raise? Education. [It is the answer] to everything. To reach a better life, I need to seek further education.

Student 2: Not necessarily, sometimes a certain signature can help you out.

Student 1: Yes, but we don't have that ability! If we did then for certain...

(audible laughter)

Student 2: A signature to sort you out, a *Wasta* in summary.

Student 3: a *wasta* is the reason for... you cannot get through without it.

Some participants expressed frustration that although university admissions and selection criteria are restricting, other students who have access to a *wasta* can gain an offer even without meeting this criteria.

Saud (M, 22, COT student) explains that despite his ‘good’ GPA, he did not get his first post-secondary choice because others took his place, explaining it in this way:

³⁶ Vitamin ‘w’ was used in jest to refer to a ‘wasta’, as in taking a dose of something that could provide benefits and bypass social ‘deficiencies’.

I'm not the only person who had a good secondary GPA, but I know people with lower GPAs than me that applied at the same time as me and they got in [to university] and excelled using a *wasta*.

In absence of the *wasta*, the admissions criteria remains a barrier to entry and future progression:

The admissions restrictions force you into places you don't want to be in, so many [students] are in big universities and stuff. But they don't succeed. What happened is they are there because of a *wasta* or something like that" (Rami, M, 19, COT student).

Shereen (F, 16, public secondary student) shares this view: "I know girls that had low grades in secondary but now they are in universities because of *wastas*". One student points out that "if you get the *wasta*, the restrictions disappear." Rami (M, 22, COT Student) elaborates further:

The *wasta* has influenced many things, as Thamer said, there are students in the wrong place. They are in this college, but should be in more elite colleges... A promotion [at work] comes with a *wasta*. It plays a big role. [For instance] in KFUPM, which is a well-known, strong and established university, I know students in [the university] that did not have the [required] GPA or anything, but got in with a *wasta*. And there are students here that have the [required] GPAs and grades...but they did not find anyone to help them, and nothing was available other than this.

A discussion between students in one COT illustrates this. When the facilitator asked why the students did not apply to other VET polytechnics that are labelled as 'training ending in employment' programs the students replied that those were especially hard to access:

Facilitator: Have you heard of other programs, like ITC or SPSP or Sadara?

Saud: you need the father of all *wastas* for that

Rami: those two in particular you need a *wasta* to get in

Facilitator: So you did not apply?

Saud: we applied, half of Saudi has applied to ITC and CPC and SPSP

Facilitator: What about companies, like Sadara?

Saud: All of these companies that are training ending in employment. I got into three of them in Jubail and then I got refused because someone else got in with a *wasta*.

Facilitator: You mean you got accepted and then they refused you because of a *wasta*? Are you sure?

Saud: because of a *wasta*, I am sure.

Thamer: You find the restrictions for ITC and CPC 60% or 80%, I got 60% but they didn't accept me, why not? And they say there are limited spaces, I was one of the first to apply, on the specified day...it [would need a] *wasta*.

Bader: I know someone whose GPA wouldn't have qualified him to get into medicine, and he went to the medicine department at one university, and he says I was standing next to the admissions employee, and he deleted someone's name and put my name down in his place, in front of my eyes, on the computer. And this friend is a credible source. This happened because of a *wasta*, there's no other reason. Oh, and he wanted three of his friends to get in to, and the admissions employee had no problem removing others... it's a *wasta*.

Bader went on to summarise the benefit of a *wasta*: "The person that has a *wasta* is the one that will live..." (M, 19, COT student).

Although access to a *wasta* can help overcome admissions obstacles, it can also limit choice and restrict the ability to change direction. Utilising a *wasta* enters an individual (or his/her parents) into an informal 'social contract' and they therefore become responsible for upholding their agreed commitment. In order to ensure that an individual can benefit from his or her social network, participants were often pushed into compromises that they otherwise may not have chosen. As one student from the private industrial institute notes, "sometimes you go along with society in order not to be rejected". In this way, although *wastas* provide opportunities, being part of a strong social network can also limit the individual agency of members of the network, and the choices that are available are limited by what your social network approves of and chooses to

facilitate. Viewing a *wasta* as a binding agreement leads some students to claim to reject the favours, as Bader (M, 29, COT student) explains: "I do not accept *wastas*. I will get in by my own effort and finish with my own hard work." Especially when family members utilise their social connections, young people's ability to choose becomes more compromised, as the experience of Nasser, a 20 year old male student in a small COT illustrates:

On Friday we were having lunch and my dad came and said what do you want to be? And I said I want to be a pilot and my dad said ever since you graduated [secondary] you've been saying this. Let's see.. and suddenly and I mean I didn't even want to do this but my uncle applied to the technical college for me.. Don't say pilot or whatever you keep saying, it is clear you do not want to do anything and you are taking us for a ride... He had applied to an accounting specialization in the technical college.. and my dad was praising him.. and I didn't want this I don't want to be an accountant it's hard and all maths. But for my dad I decided I will go into it.

Because *wastas* are reciprocal, there is an expectation that everyone will carry partial responsibility for a successful outcome. Students who are not putting forth an effort to maintain their performance can lose the support of their *wasta*, decreasing future access to the social capital that has allowed them to compensate for other shortcomings. Nasser's experience also raises the importance of family influence on post-secondary opportunities, which will be discussed further in section 7.5. The following discussion between Nasser and Hashim (M, 21, COT student) further highlights the reciprocal nature of a *wasta*:

Nasser (20): with a *wasta*, nobody is going to vouch for you if you have a low GPA, because even your *wasta* has a reputation, and if you have a low GPA he will get embarrassed from the person he's trying to mediate for you, but if you have a GPA of 4 or 4.5 and you ask him to vouch for you he will say yes, you, I will be your *wasta*.

Hashim (21): Nah, look, jobs are distributed from God, so now, I mean if my GPA is 4 and Nasser's is 3 maybe when I apply they take

him and not me, it happens to a lot of people that apply to institutes or something. I have a lower GPA, and the guy that applied with me had a higher one, but he didn't get in.. so it's confusing. I can't go negotiate and say 'why did you let me in and not him', and on the other hand I can't say 'why did you let him in and not me when as he said his GPA is low?...' The *wasta* will be influential... nobody can deny that... nobody denies that getting something has a lot to do with a *wasta*. When I graduate and I know the bank's manager, even if my GPA is under 3 or 2 or 1 and I know the manager, the papers are under the table, it's not hard to do.

In a one-on-one interview Rami (M, 19, COT student), who dropped out of the technical college, discusses blaming his failure on his own negligence, but is angry with his father for not connecting him to a stronger *wasta*. He believes that those within his network could have helped him more, but his low academic performance has made it difficult to trust his commitment: "[my father's connections] are in [influential] positions, so...it wouldn't harm them to let me in, and act as my *wasta*".

Rami's negligence has made his father reluctant to help, as his father may lose credibility with his *wastas* if Rami does not perform to expectation. In turn, Rami feels betrayed, increasing future employment risks, and describes his future as uncertain: "But at this time specifically, I mean, honestly I don't know what will happen, you feel it is unknown, very unknown". While social networks serve as a safety net for many, individual efforts are also necessary, and qualifications alone often do not give unlimited access to opportunity. Instead, a combination of qualifications, and connections help young people navigate through the restricted tertiary pathways. Failure to perform according to expectation can lead to a severing of access to a social network. As Thamer (M, 23, COT student) describes it, customs and traditions (and *wastas*) help young people prove their employability in absence of other qualifications:

In my opinion, in terms of customs and traditions, with registration and enrolment [in universities], and with job applications, *wastas* come into play. Yes, of course, this person is from my tribe, I have to employ him,

or he's one of my people, so I have to employ him. Or [religious] sects, that guy is this or that sect, I won't employ him...

Thamer believes that *wastas* are a part of tradition, and utilising *wastas* is customary and acceptable, despite the institutional systems in place that promote meritocratic achievements. Belonging to a social network helps young people paint aspirations and goals that are framed within the level of social capital they have access to, shaping their horizons for action and guiding their choices and decisions. However, membership in a social network can limit the individual choices young people can make and limit their agency, especially when combined with other social characteristics such as limited financial resources and low individual academic attainment. Acting within a limited horizon for action can cap aspirations and trap young people within a social class rather than allow for social mobility. Furthermore, despite the Saudi education system's standard curriculum (see Chapter Two), the variations in regional resources, large population size and social origin also mean that many young people do not have access to the same quality of education, selection of specialisation, or exposure to diverse economic activities. This institutional variation combined with a lack of access to *wastas* deepens social inequalities and disadvantages. Furthermore, those who did not have a strong network or who 'broke the social contract' were forced to take on more risk and had more limited opportunities and choices. Limited opportunities can be further exacerbated at the intersection of different social characteristics, such as gender.

6.2 Financial Resources

The availability of opportunities along transition pathways can be less dependent on an individual's efforts and depend more on the 'opportunity structures' (see Section 3.2) that govern movement within available secondary and post-secondary choices. As discussed in 3.2, Reay *et al.* (2001), Becker and Hecken (2009) and Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) characterise educational settings as sites where class relations and socioeconomic status are maintained and perpetuated, as institutional frameworks and education pathways can either limit or facilitate access to desired choices. In line with

such arguments, the experience of young Saudis interviewed individually and within focus groups for this study suggest that socioeconomic status appeared to influence the availability of different post-secondary pathways. This influence was apparent in the quality of career guidance they could afford, and the resulting aspirations and career plans that ensued. While not the only influential factor, financial resources tended to perpetuate patterns of opinions along different socioeconomic lines (Ball and Vincent 1998).

While all participants navigate their transitions along the same institutional pathways, access to financial resources appeared to either enhance or suppress the ability to overcome obstacles and access choices for young people. Students with more financial resources, measured primarily by the type of school they attended (private/public) had greater access to academic and career guidance, which appeared to lead to higher aspirations throughout secondary school. The private secondary students' aspirations tended to be specific and considered. For instance, the students in private secondary schools had aspirations to work in criminology, social media, aviation, law, and plastic surgery. Muhannad (M, 16, private secondary student), for example, wanted to study law if he remained in Saudi Arabia, but geology if he studied abroad. He further elaborated on this, "I would study geology to work in Aramco, but law if I want to open my own legal practice". Not only has Muhannad considered specialisations, but he also considered specific future destinations and work arrangements. Career guidance is generally absent from public secondary schools, which leads to a reliance on parental knowledge and recommendations (See Chapters Two and Six). Access to career guidance was thus dependent on one's financial resources, as some parental knowledge and networks are more informed, and some private secondary schools provide guidance counsellors and university preparatory courses to fill in knowledge gaps. The students in my sample from the private secondary schools were more motivated and confident and were more trusting of the education and employment system as well as the adults in their lives. Ola (F, 15, private secondary)

describes the process she went through in searching for a very specific specialisation she aspired to:

I want to be an investigator, but whenever I tell anyone they say you won't be able to specialise in that because here in Saudi we don't have criminal investigators. So, they kind of crushed my aspirations. But then I started telling my mother, and she tried to help me find something close to criminal investigation, which was forensic medicine. She is a forensic doctor, so she let me go to work with her and see what they do, and explained it. So now I like forensic medicine more than criminal investigation. But originally, I did want to be an investigator.

Ola's aspirations were specific, and although she was not able to pursue her original aspiration, she had access to specialised knowledge through her mother, and was able to make informed compromises that may get her close to her goal. Ola's experience also sheds light on the intersection of gender and financial resources. The women in my sample from more affluent backgrounds tended to have a more positive outlook on their career prospects, and a heightened awareness of the opportunities and limitations available to them, a point that will be discussed in more depth in section 6.3.

Similarly, Nayef (M, 16, private secondary student) noted that he wanted to study "astronomy, because I can make money and learn, and it is reputable and has status. And the universities I want to attend are CPC or KFUPM³⁷" (M, 16, Private secondary student). Nayef trusted that he would be able to realise his ambitions in these local universities and programs in a prestigious field.

In contrast to the students in expensive private school education, the students in inner-city secondary schools had less sophisticated plans, and also displayed more scepticism about the education system's ability to provide future opportunities. Adib (M,

³⁷ CPC is an Aramco preparatory program that provides one year orientation in Saudi Arabia and then provides scholarships for students to study abroad in elite international universities. KFUPM is the top university in the kingdom.

15, public secondary student), a student at an inner city public secondary school, for instance, aspired to go to the KFUPM, but was much less specific about his reasoning or future prospects: "I chose it because when you study there you can get any job you want later, a doctor, an engineer, you choose what you want...my friends told me." Another student from an inner-city girl's secondary school described a passive approach to transition choices.

If I find that something that I want is difficult to achieve, then I will leave it and go to something else. I mean, if it's available for me I will go into it, like engineering...if the opportunity is in front of me I will go to it...

This student's description of post-secondary plans appear to be more passive, and much less sophisticated than the students that have access to more careers guidance in private schools.

As discussed in 2.7.1, the secondary school system, while characterised as predominantly comprehensive, allows students to specialise in different tracks that limit the availability of choices of tertiary education. However, many of the students appear to trivialise these restrictions (See Chapter Five). In light of the more meticulous planning of private school secondary students, the public-school students' less detailed descriptions of their transitions suggest that access to the social and cultural capital that is available in private schools affects young people's ability to plan their future in a way that maximises their future options. Financial resources in this way are an underlying factor that leads to unequal access to potential future destinations.

In addition to the level of complexity in planning, economic status also influences the motivation of students, especially when combined with individual academic performance. Responses of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds vary on a spectrum from being angry to disengaged. In the absence of financial resources, academic scores usually influence the way this transpires. Students with low financial resources and low academic performance were disappointed that they would be trapped within their existing socioeconomic status, but did not always feel the need to change

their behaviour. My WhatsApp interview with Bassam (M, 17, Public secondary), a secondary student from a low socioeconomic background who did not want to go into TVET illustrates his disengagement in the transition process:

Bassam: but I want money and that's it

Interviewer: So what do you have to do?

Bassam: Study

Interviewer: And do you want to?

Bassam: Yes I want to

Interviewer: You would need to work hard

Bassam: So? I am excellent in the subjects I like

Interviewer: So you put in the effort?

Bassam: No, I don't have to

In our interview, Bassam expressed frustration with his low socioeconomic status but did not envision himself overcoming this due to his low academic motivation and drive. He explained that his low attainment would signal poor work ethic and he would enter the labour market at a disadvantage that he believed would be too difficult to overcome. He was not willing to work at an entry level job in the private sector, and saw only two options; to get rich through luck and independent work, or to join the military like the rest of his family. Bassam's father and brothers were in the military, and although he explicitly claimed that he wished he did not have to follow their pathway, he did not know how to avoid this. Bassam's sentiments were in contrast to Amjad's (See Section 6.1.2), who wanted to benefit from his strong social network. Instead, Bassam's story highlights the strength of social networks in shaping horizons for action (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996), as relatives and trusted adults influence the way choices are envisioned, often marginalising agency and overriding individual preferences.

Wadha (F, 15, public secondary student), on the other hand, was extremely frustrated by her inability to compete academically for opportunities because of her lower socioeconomic status. She explained that while there were some public schools that were academically strong, this criteria did not apply to her school and the majority of her peers were disengaged and uninterested in school. To overcome this, she wished she

could go to private school, but because she lacked the resources, she instead worked harder in school and actively sought out different academic opportunities:

The students here aren't involved in their schooling. And I am forced to work with a group that is not productive, and they won't work with me because they don't have goals... If there was something in my power, I would have done it. I complained to my father a lot, and he says whatever you want me to do I will do. And it's true, he tried with the city administration to move me to another school, and he tried with a lot of people, he didn't hold back. And he supports me in my pursuit of scholarships, and was behind me with the Harvard program, and he pushed me to take the IELTS, but there isn't anything in my power.

And my father is retired now, he can't pay more than SR30,000 on a private school, and they are far, this is in addition to his home expenses and the expenses of a new home, etc. It is SR30,000 per semester. Private schools are exaggerating unfortunately. It's in exchange for something I mean, but I see that there is no need for these prices.

Although some students may not be aware of disadvantageous structural forces that are related to financial resources, their limited knowledge and aspirations can be attributed in part to the shortcomings of careers guidance in the public education system. While the students consider different opportunities, some do so in a passive manner rather than through deliberate planning, and others respond with a more forceful planning approach to achieve social mobility. This is more often the case with young women (a point to be discussed in more depth in Section 6.3.1).

Affluence, therefore, plays a role in a student's ability to plan future education and careers more specifically and anticipate a variety of setbacks and opportunities early in the process. The lack of financial resources, on the other hand, most often leads to a more passive or fatalistic approach to post-secondary pathway planning, and students from less affluent families tend to follow their family's recommendations and are limited by the cultural capital that their parents transfer to them.

The symbolic value of some routes contributed to the way some opportunities were regarded by students as more valuable than others. In Chapter Two an overview of historical symbols of prestige in Saudi Arabia showed that young people coveted positions that provide proximity to power and government. The Saudis that occupied the first prestigious government positions and obtained high ranking and high paying government and semi-governmental jobs had all received scholarships to study abroad. Incidentally, scholarships were viewed by students as the best post-secondary pathway, if obtainable. Studying abroad provides a higher status certification and for many this means a higher chance to work in Aramco or Sabic and other companies in the oil and gas field. Sameera (F, 25), for instance, a female COT student in a smaller city places a very high value on studying abroad: "To be honest I aspired to study abroad but I did not get the opportunity, and until today if I get that opportunity I would not reject it." The young men from more affluent families almost all aspire to go abroad and study, in contrast to most students from inner city schools and low-income neighbourhoods who worried about the costs and the language barrier. Those who could access private education or study abroad believed they would be able to jump the 'job queue' and therefore access more income. Socioeconomic status was seen as a resource that would compensate for other shortcomings, such as lack of a strong social network or low academic scores, as it allowed students to circumvent the restrictive tertiary field discussed in Chapter Two. For those who could afford to study abroad, secondary scores would not matter as they would be able to attend international programs and return with a certification from abroad that they believed was valued at a premium in the Saudi labour market.

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2011), and Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) highlight the way decision-making in TVET is a contextual process that carries historical cultural meanings. The cultural meanings attached to vocational education and employment often label those who go into TVET with a pre-defined 'working class' status that is stigmatised and less prestigious. Students appear to aspire to academic rather

than technical education to avoid this stigma. The negative connotations of lower status often lead to specific opinions of TVET that in the Saudi case are often related to the way others respond to the choice, not necessarily to the nature of the VET job and the demands of TVET itself. That is to say, the students often do not seem averse to the nature of the work TVET entails but are more averse to the way it is perceived. The students whose views were dominated by a 'last resort' narrative, as discussed in Chapter Five, were hoping that they could avoid TVET to avoid the stigma. Socioeconomic needs, however, can supersede this, and some of the students who enrolled in tertiary TVET colleges chose one TVET program over another due to the associated bursaries throughout their enrolment. This indicates a pragmatic financial approach to academic choice rather than one based on preferences. Rashed's description of his experience illuminates this:

[when I applied] I got into the community college and the technical one and the thing that made me not consider the community college is the first two years you don't get a bursary, so I disregarded it... I said this is better, I like the specialization more and there is a bursary, so I chose it. (Rashed, M, 22, COT student)

Students who discussed TVET as a welcome alternative were also often from a low socioeconomic background. These students, while a minority in the sample, were hoping to continue to work in small scale vocational work with their family members (See Section 5.5), and enter the labour market faster, as COTs offered two-year diplomas. In this case, socioeconomic status can be seen to further motivate students' draw toward TVET, but also raises questions about the choices that are available when horizons for action are shaped by a social network that is already at a disadvantage, and whether this cycle of entrapment in one socioeconomic status can be overcome, and how that could happen without a systematic change in the resources available through government schools.

The disadvantages related to low socioeconomic status can be overcome, but the young people who are not provided with career guidance resources through the education system sometimes feel that the difficulties are insurmountable. The details of

the disadvantages aren't always clear to the young people, but there is an awareness of uneven access to opportunities. Access to financial resources tends to strengthen students' ability to navigate transition pathways, and the absence of such resources often leads to a stagnant social position and a limited number of opportunities that feel safe and familiar, albeit disappointing at times. Social networks further facilitate opportunities for young people across different socioeconomic classes. Access to a strong social network acts as a social lubricant when other social characteristics such as low income or gender act as a barrier.

6.3 Gender expectations

While young people in Saudi Arabia face similar pathway opportunities and are influenced by social relationships and financial resources, the way these social structures set expectations, limits and opportunities are experienced in very different ways for both young men and young women. The participants develop their aspirations in line with the expectations projected onto them by society. While some of the participants describe futures that do not conform with traditional gendered roles, especially if they are exposed to different cultural contexts, most of the participants describe their future success in light of expectations rather than despite them.

6.3.1 Young women

In addition to options being contingent on factors such as secondary school choices for which they receive little guidance or their access to social networks, young women are presented with additional challenges that are related to their social position. The post-secondary field, made up of institutional opportunity pathways, family/social expectations, and individual perceptions shape young women's horizons for action, delineating the way their aspirations are formed and TVET is perceived. These 'horizons for action' are formed as a result of the field governed by the stakeholders involved and the power relationships between the different players, influencing how choices are negotiated.

The level of cultural capital governs the breadth of horizons, as women face the same social institutions but are not always equipped to face the discrimination against their integration into previously male-dominated domains. For women in Saudi Arabia, cultural capital is accumulated over time in the form of socially accepted behaviours that are shaped by an overarching patriarchal social structure that has 'codified' gender roles and responsibilities socially, and at times, bureaucratically as well wherein the norm is for women to play a less prominent and inferior role to men. This structure arguably disadvantages women, because of the way social expectations can act as barriers despite increased economic opportunities and the spread of more egalitarian legislation (Blossfeld *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, many of the participants aspired to fulfil traditional social roles that appear to marginalise their social contributions, and despite the limits these roles place on their individual choices. In fact, many of the young women expressed an appreciation for the division of labour that is widespread; where young men act as breadwinners and young women act primarily as caretakers, perpetuating a traditional system that they see value in and appreciate.

Discussions with young women highlight the complex and uneven nature of pathways. The young women's experiences illuminated several narratives about which kinds of jobs and academic tracks were suitable for young women. Some were satisfied with the available post-secondary routes and others believed that the pathways did not provide many options and therefore were limiting. The young women openly discussed the way social perceptions framed choices and decisions. They also expressed conflicted opinions of the limitations created when social perceptions override opportunities available within existing institutional pathways. The following exchange with secondary students highlights a range of opinions young women have of opportunities:

Nora: My sister wanted to enrol in medicine, but then she enrolled in university and found herself in business management and marketing.

Facilitator: She did not get accepted to medical school?

Nora: No, she couldn't [go through with it]. Not that she [didn't get accepted], everything was ok [with the admissions requirements]. But at the same time, she kept thinking what's medicine like... what would people say... It's always [believed that] marketing and management is more suitable for women, in the perception of society.

Facilitator: You feel that society perceives management to be more suitable for women? And you feel that your sister was influenced by social perceptions? Can you elaborate?

Nora: my sister is very influenced by society

Student 1: There are barriers...

Student 2: It's traditions and culture

Student 3: Genders mix

Student 4: Like when a girl works in a mixed environment... that's it [for her reputation].

Hissa: she shouldn't work in a mixed environment?

Facilitator: Did you have a point about genders mixing?

Hissa: I am saying what do traditions and culture have to do with it? A girl should not be forced not to go into medicine because it is mixed.

Student 1: Yes, but there are traditions and norms

Student 2: Some families don't allow it.

Student 3: She will always be in the hospital.

Fajer: She would stay late in the hospital...some men choose not marry a women who is a doctor

Facilitator: Do you feel that you have experienced something like this?

Nora: In my family? I have seen it a lot...One relative of mine, when she got married her husband forced her to leave her job. The problem is her certificate was very prestigious. Now she stays home. This is because of the culture and traditions. I don't think it's a 100% wrong, because maybe it's true the husband has the right... how is it that she is not at home, and most of the time, so who will take care of the house? In the same time, I think that a girl must get what she wants.

These young women believe that although opportunities are available, social norms and traditions create barriers that are exclusive to young women. Factors related to marriage, childcare and reputation influence how women make academic and career choices, but also create conflict and frustration for them. Many of the young women also expressed an awareness about the shift in traditions that were more restrictive in the past. Reham, for instance, described her understanding of how opportunities for women are changing: “A long time ago they were more strict, and customs, traditions, shame and other things.. I think these things are backwards, but they have begun thinking” (Reham, F, 15, Public secondary). During the interview, she went on to describe some of these ‘customs and traditions’: “That when a girl gets married she has to stay home, because a girl’s place in in her home and a man’s is outside...that men can do anything but girls cannot”. Reham illustrates the diversity in opinions about gendered expectations, and highlights that some young women find this more restrictive than others.

Despite the varying opinions of what is ‘suitable’ for young women, all of the young women believed in the importance of tertiary education. Attending tertiary education provided young women with a sense of self-worth, as educational settings were a space where they could be in control of their decisions and engage in society beyond the home. As universities are gender segregated, young women would not meet potential suitors as they would in similar further or higher education settings in other parts of the world, but they may expand their social relationships and meet other women seeking suitable suitors for their brothers or sons. The young women expressed a belief in that education would allow them to enhance their overall life experiences either as homemakers or as employees. As May notes, “It’s not my aspiration to just be responsible for home and children only, and I felt that I wanted—I needed to develop in education more, so I enrolled in the technical college” (May, F, 27, COT student). Bushra a recent accounting graduate from a COT and a holder of a Bachelor’s of Science in maths explains that she had the post-secondary aspiration to go to university with her

peers in secondary school, as this was the norm for all young women at the end of their secondary studies:

It depends on each girl's circumstances, some aspire to continue their studies, but their husbands don't allow it, some think I don't want to sit at home and so on, there are different circumstances but the goal is the same, to go to university and get a certification.

The descriptions of May and Bushra highlight the importance they attribute to post-secondary education, but also point to some of the limitations women are faced with because of gendered expectations. Most of the women participants were motivated to complete their certifications, however they are exposed to the social pressure to follow a more domestic route. Young women were either directly limited by their family members or felt pressured by their family's expectations to make choices in line with their views. In the focus groups the young women expressed concerns that they would not be able to pursue an aspiration if it interfered with the social expectation of marriage and caretaking. The following exchange highlights the variation in opinions, but the way in which marriage can be seen as limiting to aspirations:

Nada (16): But I feel that at the end marriage determines everything. You are given an ultimatum between leaving work or leaving your family. So that's why I feel marriage is an obstacle.

Najwa (16): It depends.

Manar (16): I might be able to get married and balance between marriage and studies. It has nothing to do with it, so many people got married and carried on with their studies and got their masters...

Nada: and at the same time...a lot of people stopped.

Facilitator: At the same time some stopped, and others carried on?

Nada: there are surely people who would carry on. But if you look at the cultural norms, you'll find that marriage will stop them.

The exchange implies that some young women are anxious about the level of control they have over their own decisions and are unsure of the opportunities that will remain open to them if they get married.

Most believe that despite the proliferation of more post-secondary education and employment opportunities, the prevailing gender norms prioritise a woman's role in the home, and trade-offs are often forced upon them, as balancing both can be a challenge at best, and often unavailable. This can be illustrated by Latifa's (F, 25, COT student) experience, who, despite her husband's reluctance about her choice to attend a COT, worked around her circumstances to achieve her own aspirations:

when [my husband] comes back [from work travel] he wants me to be free for him...it would be impossible for him to say drop out of the college and stuff, but it kind of showed that he was sick of it, so even if I would never skip university, or my studies, because I really love my studies, I began doing it, I mean I didn't skip all the time, but in some circumstances...

Latifa's experience highlights the trade-offs she must make to achieve her aspiration for her certification. Her husband does not physically prevent her from attending the COT, a fact she went out of her way to highlight as 'impossible' for him to do, but at the same time she is somehow forced to prioritise her husband's preferences above her aspirations. In this way, she is managing both her own and her husband's expectations, but the burden is on her to navigate this extra obstacle he has put in place. Arwa (F, 26, COT student) shares a similar situation, and explained that while her husband does not force her to do anything, she is influenced by his reactions. She further elaborates:

Yes, he sees me as a successful person, and he always encourages me, but he doesn't want it to affect him and the kids. Sometimes I feel he encourages me and sometimes I feel he is bored of my ideas and dreams.

The discussions about future aspirations highlight a duality of ambitions: women have aspirations to work and would like to pursue them, but also want to fulfil their expected social role, and the two are not always aligned. One way in which the duality of aspirations was addressed was by adopting a 'can do, will do (don't have to)' attitude about employment. They discuss career aspirations but acknowledge the compromises that need to be made to pursue them alongside or instead of more socially accepted

aspirations. All of the young women believed that if possible, it was a husband's duty to financially maintain their household, meaning that for many of them a certification was not a functional pursuit, but symbolised independence. For many, they pursued future opportunities as a status symbol, but also as a backup, or a safety net in case a turning point in their life results in the failure of the social safety net that protects them from needing to pursue employment to support their own livelihoods. Women therefore tend to aspire to create several backup plans: a university certification for status, a vocational certification that fulfils labour market skill demand, and pursuit of hobbies that could allow them to excel in both these fields, or to be more distinguished homemakers. My interview with Jawaher (F, 25, COT student) further illustrates the way young women navigate through the post-secondary pathway:

Jawaher: For instance if a girl is studying and aspires to finish her studies first and then get married but is presented with the opportunity to get married during her studies, she will accept marriage and sacrifice studies, then after a while she will feel that she lost the opportunity that she could have had, which is studying

Interviewer: And how would she benefit from her studies?

Jawaher: So there are features of our traditions that make it easier to reach our [desired] futures, but [if we take them] we will wish that we lived with the difficulties so that we could feel the flavour of each moment. [She would benefit from her studies in that] she would have gotten a certification and then a job.

Interviewer: But perhaps her husband will support her

Jawaher: And even if she doesn't get a job she will have a certification to be proud of. And maybe her marriage won't work out. At that point she could utilise her certification to her benefit.

Jawaher's opinion highlights the higher value women place on their own education as a source of self-worth in comparison to the value society places on traditional gender roles in the home. Opportunities can be limited by marriage and family obligations, and therefore, women tend to strive to complete post-secondary education before their

chances are compromised. While opportunities are available, the pressure to pursue them is more an internal one rather than an external one. These young women used vocational education as a tactic to mitigate a future related to unpredictable junctures along their transition pathways.

However, in other cases women discuss their appreciation for prevailing norms. Arwa (F, 26, COT student), mentioned earlier, explains that “it’s the nature of women to like to be protected and they like to [just] deal with other women more”. Additionally, most of the women prioritised their homes and families when asked about their future aspirations. Arwa expressed that in ten years “I see myself above all a capable and successful mother that can manage her home and succeed and stand out in her job, God willing.”

The COTs provided some young women with a welcome challenge that they had disappointingly not received in university, and they frequently cited the ability to prove oneself in the smaller setting of the classes in the college and the closer relationship they had both to the subject matter and their trainers. Most of the young women enrolled in TVET viewed it as a welcome alternative (See Chapter Five). All but one of the young women in the COT focus group had a Bachelor’s degree from a local public university, and they unanimously agreed that the college was a better place for them than the university they had attended. They described their university experiences as a waste of time and a demotivating experience. Most of them were in specializations that had limited employment opportunities for young women, such as Sameera (F, 25, COT student) who went to the college of agriculture. These students frequently juxtaposed the positive and encouraging environment in the COT with a negative and impersonal experience that they had in university. As Arwa puts it,

The college was soooo much better than my university days. I became more confident and I became more daring. I discovered strengths that I didn’t know about before and that is due to the encouragement I got from those around me (F, 26, COT student).

Initially, young women in secondary do not aspire to pursue TVET as they tended to think of the offerings as male-oriented. However, discussions with the young women in the COT show that once they learn that public technical and vocational colleges offer primarily administrative specialisations for young women, they were often more appealing than university.

For many young women, COTs provided a space they could excel in as well as build relationships outside their direct family engagements. As work environments become more mixed-gender integrated, and women from conservative families would not accept a job in a mixed gender environment, they are left with few spaces where they can forge new relationships. In this way, the data suggests that while young women display a preference for vocational education because of the way the COTs operate, the scarcity of vocational institutes, the lack of guidance within the comprehensive secondary schools, and the reputation of vocational schools within society place this post-secondary option beyond their horizon for action, limiting women's access to vocational education despite its appeal to them.

The young women enrolled in COTs found that the demands of the vocational college and the learning environment more closely aligned to their aspirations to build more intimate social connections, as described by Sameera:

The difference with the technical college from university is something else, here in the technical college it's not harder than university but it's different skills, universities are very traditional, in lecture halls, it's grand...but they don't really know if you come or not (F, 25, COT student).

Another student at the women's COT expresses a different appreciation for the more focused and intimate environment within vocational colleges:

In university, you get back as much as you put in, the more you receive the better you become, but here, I feel we are tied down to the technical college more, because we see immediate accomplishments and we have manual skills, I feel that's why we like the technical school more, and also the focus on the trainee is big, I mean, they pay attention to

us, maybe that is due to the smaller numbers... but this is a benefit... no matter how big it gets it remains training...I feel it is what we used to look for and couldn't find [in university.]

The intersection between socioeconomic status and gender further highlights the variety of challenges young people need to navigate. Women who had access to more resources tended to have aspirations that went beyond the opportunities available to them in the Saudi economy. As young women encounter increased opportunities and grow their aspirations, they realise that their desired career goals cannot be met by the opportunities within the Saudi education and employment worlds. Lack of specialisations or spaces, or limited employment prospects create uncertainty even when cultural norms do not interfere with aspirations.

Young women in private schools, where the educational environment was more pastoral, developed skills alongside the general curriculum, and had their confidence and positive outlook on life enhanced. They thought about occupational aspirations that were not necessarily stereotypical of young Saudi women, such as criminology and law, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The young women in environments that were less supportive spoke more about their contribution to their family, and less about aspirations toward individual accomplishments. In an interview, Sulafa (F, 17, inner city public secondary), for instance, describes three future goals for herself in this way:

(1) I hope to be in my own job and have accomplished some sort of project, and (2) That my mother's situation gets better and she supports my siblings financially better, and (3) That I help my aunt get treatment because she is unwell, and I want her to be well.

While she does aspire to work, her focus is on her contribution to her family and less on her personal aspirations. May's (F, 27, COT student) experience further highlights the burden women have in balancing responsibilities at home with studies, and the way this is compounded by financial stress. May began studies with government

funding and describes her situation once her funding ran out before she finished her course:

[I decided to try and] pressure myself to finish, and in the beginning I found difficulties and was exhausted and physically and emotionally tired, to give my home its rightful effort, and I took more (courses) so I started balancing, I mean between studying and the stress, even the other girls in the beginning would say why are you putting so much pressure on yourself, but I like this, and I don't want to lose the opportunity to study English or get the diploma.

May's attitude highlights the way many of the women I interviewed do not consider pursuing education for functional purposes, but as a symbolic endeavour.

In addition to the symbolic endeavour, the limits on what women can do often inspires them to work toward enhancing opportunities for others. Arwa (F, 26, COT student) shares her desire to find work counselling women "because most women want to do things and they cannot...[they need some more confidence and someone to help them with their ideas]."

Young women are faced with systematic limitations to their choices that are not only institutional but closely related to persisting social and cultural norms that define their roles in ways that are not always in line with their own perceptions. Despite prevailing social pressures, most of the young female participants remained motivated to pursue their aspirations. Within this social structure, however, the women's aspirations are not always achievable, and they are often disregarded as less important than the aspirations society holds for them. The young women pursuing TVET certifications are often doing so to add to their list of personal achievements. In this way, the data suggests that not only are young women constrained by the same risks that their male peers are faced with in a limited and selective post-secondary employment and education field, but these risks are more uncertain as a result of pressure to conform. While the structure of secondary and tertiary systems create limitations for young men and women, persistent gendered expectations and traditional roles perpetuate this, and

play an influential role in the approach young people take in making post-secondary decisions. Especially in light of Section 6.1.1, where maintaining the family unit takes priority, restrictions young women face on top of the limitations of the tertiary education system indicate that the influence of cultural gender norms continues to frame their horizons for action (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996) more narrowly than their male peers.

6.3.2 Young men

Gendered expectations and ideas of masculinity influence the way young men approach post-secondary opportunities. For young men, social pressure tends to be a force that drives their aspirations away from TVET rather than towards it. While young men are favoured in terms of access to opportunities, they are also pressured to fulfil the role of the breadwinner, which leads many of them to look for the pathway with the least obstacles to achieving this, rather than a technical decision based on maximising their skills and preferences. Young men also take social rankings of status into consideration when making choices, and strive to be regarded as successful, often internalising social definitions of opportunity rather than formulating aspirations in line with their personal preferences.

Almost all of the young men describe their aspirations for the future which all include supporting a family, as Yousef (M, 15, Public Secondary) describes it:

I will depend on myself, be an engineer or a teacher or in aviation...
My mind will be at ease.. [I will have] a house, marriage...get a job in
Aramco, build a house, and get into an excellent university.

The young men stated that society measures success by job title, salary and the ability to support a family. The young men's descriptions of their ideal transitions tend to reference status. As Luay described it (M, 16, public secondary), "If you go to university you can build a house faster, and get married faster."

These indicators are internalised by young men and are given importance. The participants openly discussed the importance of achieving a positive reputation within society to access these markers of success or status, as Ashraf (M, 16, Public Secondary) points out:

Social perception even makes a difference with marriage, like when a person doesn't have a job ...maybe he will just take any job to get married, their perception is negative and they won't marry to him. It's a bad thing.

Furthermore, Aws (M, 17, Public Secondary) admits that he would alter his opinions to maintain a positive social image:

Since we were young, we are raised with the idea of social perception being the dominant influence on your choices, if [they] say that something is not good, we will change our preferences because of the social perceptions... we can't go against society.

As discussed in Chapter Two, many of the more technical specialisations were traditionally performed by non-Saudi males, which led young Saudi men to discount their suitability. Firas (M, 34, Private VET) explains how family members give less value to fields that were dominated by non-Saudi labourers:

One of the funny things about social perceptions if someone studies welding and graduates his mother would be upset. When you ask why she says you will work with [expatriates]. So [you go through] choosing a specialization, then studying and all the effort, and in the end you work with [foreigners].

Therefore, young men who considered or appreciated TVET aspired to more administrative than industrial trades in TVET. Those who were unable to access the administrative roles would then 'settle' for the craft specializations such as electrical training, mechanics and welding. Faisal's opinion highlights this:

I liked instrumentation³⁸, because, honestly, it was all about control systems, it's not a very manual field...maybe it's easier/more comfortable than the other specializations, so that's why I chose it.
(Faisal, M, 24, Private VET)

Young men described how dominant social perceptions of TVET influenced their views, despite their views of its status being different to its reputation. Salman's (M, 17, COT student) viewpoint highlights this perception:

The society's perception it made you feel that it's (bad) but when we got here we found out that even the certification is strong, but we used to think based on what people say that it's (normal) even if you get a certification it won't do much for you, it won't be like a strong diploma, but when you ask about it and study here, it is on the contrary, you know it's a strong certification. It may be the best tech college to get a diploma from.

Because young men are identified as the future breadwinners of the family, they tend to be the favoured recipients of opportunities and *wastas*. To ensure that they can benefit from this preferential treatment, however, young men often make compromises because of the pressure to succeed and to avoid losing the *wasta*. Because of the pressure to succeed, many of the young men look for an easier route to gain a 'success' label, and often seek government employment as it will give them status with less risk. Many young men discuss and contemplate ways to minimise risks and follow opportunities that they describe as easier to achieve. Their aversion to and fear of failure is reflected in their desire to ensure that they achieve adult status with few setbacks. While most students claim to aspire to the highest possible achievement regardless of their socioeconomic status, idolizing doctors, engineers and entrepreneurs, many vocalise their doubt in achieving these goals and often opt for less challenging educational endeavours to avoid disappointment or 'failure'. Furthermore, while most of the young men aspired to pursue

³⁸ Related to the use of electrical instruments for the oil and gas industry (SPSP)

post-secondary education, many admitted that they would accept an opportunity where they were able to get money without working, if they were to make enough to support their future aspirations.

Family obligations and fulfilling the role of breadwinner was described in different ways by the young men. Adel, for instance, prioritised his family obligations over his training, which ultimately led to him being expelled from the college. He describes how his role providing for his mother, both by continuing to work and by providing her with transportation, took precedence over his training obligations:

When my mother got sick and there was not anyone there aside from me. I have brothers but they are all young, and I have a brother who's older than me but he's abroad. I work and I have a shop and I go to the college. I didn't [organise my time] so when my mother got sick she had morning appointments I would excuse myself and the college would allow my absence. My GPA went down so the dean called me, because we were in touch, and the dean told me, 'Adel, I asked about your GPA and they said his performance is down, and I will advise you if you do not want to graduate with low attainment leave now, because it won't do you any good'. I listened to his advice and I withdrew my file. Now I am looking for a better job and I ask God that he will award me for my good intentions.

Adel's experience highlights the importance he places on family. For him, neglecting family obligations would result in a negative social perception. He goes on to explain that he wanted to make his father proud and have a good salary. However, the pathway to achieving this was not straightforward for Adel, as he was not putting forth the efforts needed to obtain a good job and was pressured by familial commitments rather than educational ones.

The influence of socioeconomic status also played a role in the way young men navigated their educational transition pathways. Students from more affluent backgrounds are confident in their ability to succeed in post-secondary education. None of the students in private secondary schools mentioned TVET as a potential post-

secondary destination, as most wanted to pursue specific university programs either locally or abroad, as mentioned in Chapter Five. These students outlined concrete efforts that were underway in order to reach their goals such as specializing in science rather than literature, and achieving high marks in secondary school tests and on standardised tests. In contrast, many of the young men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds had less confidence in themselves and were more inclined to pursue a less demanding post-secondary certification to avoid set-backs that may delay their qualification and employment.

All of the male secondary participants believed that they would pursue education that fell in line with their parents' aspirations for them, even when they were mismatched. However, one way that young men envisioned overcoming this tension was through the pursuit of entrepreneurial endeavours. In this way, aspirations to have one's own business was a form of asserting agency. The young men would thus satisfy their parents' aspirations for them through formal employment, and at the same time risk failure in a project or endeavour that is not their primary job or source of income. Rather than work in a private sector company, the young men aspire to work for themselves. The enterprising spirit was apparent in all young men, but especially the students that viewed TVET as a welcome alternative, as they were already part of a network where small-scale entrepreneurship was common and socially appreciated. Due to the persistence of traditions and customs, it appears that young men from certain backgrounds take pride in continuing work in sectors that may be perceived to be reserved for lower classes. So much of this work is considered 'entrepreneurial' in nature, or what is referred to in Arabic as 'free work', which was traditionally related to shepherding, farming and small trade. Nearly all of the male students that lived or had family that still lived in more rural settings mentioned 'free work' as a personal aspiration of theirs. This was particularly significant because it meant that they were not working for someone else, which historically would be a more powerful tribe. Independent work meant that they were self-sufficient, their earnings being their own. Only working for the

ruling tribe (in this case, the government) would not reduce one's status, but middle level tribes (private companies) meant that they would be indebted to someone else. Pursuing free work at the family level was therefore more attractive, despite potential risks. Students would engage in apprentice-like relationships with their fathers, and therefore had more positive views about their vocational learning and future prospects. They also displayed more confidence and were happy to share more technical knowledge about their experiences. Ayoub (M, 17, secondary industrial) or Abdulaziz (M, 22, secondary industrial) for instance, whose fathers worked in maintenance jobs or Tammam (M, 17, secondary industrial) who worked with his brother in a maintenance garage all discussed these occupations openly and with pride. Abdulaziz (M, 22, secondary industrial) explains:

I aspire to open [my own company] with my own work, and develop it and grow it properly and bring engineers, and bring, scientific developments, every year after year develop it more and improve it.

As we have seen, the influence of gender on choice and perception frames the way young men navigate through available opportunities in the transition pathway. Young men aspired to high paying jobs that have social value in order to gain a status that labels them as successful. Although the number of opportunities are larger for young men than young women, since there are more colleges and universities available to young men, and the number of employed men far surpasses the number of young women, social structures limit the agency of young men and their ability to make choices outside the constraints of social perceptions of what is desirable and acceptable. Existing expectations of gendered male and female roles frame young men's approach to navigating education and work 'choices' as well as young women's.

6.4 Conclusion

The narratives that emerged from participants' experiences with TVET shed light on the diverse views of TVET and showed that the choices young people made were driven by different experiences. To better understand how these views came about it was

necessary to further explore the influence of institutions and social structures within young people's education transition pathways. The influence of financial resources, social networks, gender and family permeate the choices of young people at all stages and frame the views and aspirations of their educational transitions. Financial resources can either enhance or depress opportunities for young people, and the experiences with access to finances highlight the way unequal access to education routes are formed. Furthermore, young people's choices are heavily influenced by the social networks to which they belong. These social networks facilitate access to certain routes but also help young people avoid routes that they otherwise might not be able to avoid in absence of such connections.

Persisting notions of gender-appropriate jobs and social expectations further outline the way young people formulate aspirations and make choices as they move from education-to-work. As discussed, this thesis is concerned with the interplay of structure and agency within the Saudi TVET choice-making landscape. By exploring the young people's narratives in light of the contextual setting (both institutional and social) within which transitions take place, several questions arise about the level of agency and choice that is available to young people within a highly structured social environment. Young people made choices that were framed by their future aspirations. However, these aspirations and choices were shaped and constrained by the social structures that young people live in.

This chapter concludes the two empirical analysis chapters exploring the data collected to answer the research questions about young people's education-to-work transitions in Saudi Arabia. The youth studies literature can provide a frame to better understand the collected data (See Chapter Three), albeit in a very different context than the one it was generated in, and where it is usually applied. The next chapter will provide an overview of the research findings, and consider the way the Saudi context offers a unique perspective on the applicability of youth educational transition literature, and ways

which these theories offer more explanations for the opportunities and limitations young people have beyond economically developed countries.

Chapter 7. Discussion: Social structures and the illusion of choice

The quality of the education that young Saudis receive and the career decisions they make are not only dependent on economic needs and availability of choice but are constricted by perceptions of what is possible and appropriate (See Chapters Five and Six). These perceptions are derived from the social structures, norms and values that shape life circumstances. The decisions of Saudi youth are shaped by the boundaries of what is acceptable, and yet young people are also complicit in shaping these boundaries through their actions and choices, by valuing expedience and risk-minimisation to secure access to the pool of social resources that would otherwise be unavailable to them. While many young people in industrialised nations are increasingly optimistic about transcending existing class ethnicity and gender determinants (despite social inequalities; See Section 5.4), the participants in this research tended to view the unravelling of traditions as threatening, leading them to make choices that perpetuated existing social institutions.

The attitudes of young people in this research toward TVET illuminate the importance attributed to the preservation and accumulation of certain kinds of social capital which they do not believe to be readily available through the pursuit of TVET. While there is a predominantly negative status to TVET globally, the socially attributed traits of TVET in Saudi Arabia provide insight to the difficulty of transcending the position of TVET without fundamental shifts to the structure of the education system. The current status of TVET acts to both limit agency and influence the individual opinions of social actors, re-enforcing this positioning. The data has illustrated how the social sanctions for breaking with mainstream norms and expectations expose young Saudis to the risk of being excluded socially. The participants thus navigate through restrictions and opportunities in order to reconcile their personal aspirations with what is socially acceptable, however the opportunity for educational and career choice falls much closer

to the structure end of the structure-agency spectrum, and the 'choices' are often the result of circumstances outside of their control.

This chapter is organised around three main sections. The first section will discuss the empirical contribution of the research through a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter Five and Six. It will draw on the Saudi context and the existing youth transitions literature presented in Chapters Two and Three and reflect on how the empirical data challenges the premise that young people should be able to make choices within the current structure, highlighting contextual nuances that stem from deeply embedded social structures. The next two sections will address the research questions posed in Chapter One: How are young people's perceptions of opportunities influenced by structural institutions? How do these perceptions influence young people's career aspirations and decisions? The first of these sections will discuss the theoretical contribution of the research, considering the implications of the findings on sociological debates of structure and agency. The second and final section will discuss the implications of the empirical research and the way young people's voices can be used to re-envision TVET policy.

7.1 Summary of findings: An empirical contribution

This research has demonstrated that young people are eager to share their opinions of educational and career aspirations, albeit somewhat hesitantly at times. As a result of asking young people open-ended questions, this qualitative research generated 925 pages of stories that shared opinions, aspirations, fears, frustrations, triumphs and at times, indifference. The individual interviews and focus groups with a total of 152 voices told a story about transitioning from education to work in Saudi Arabia. As discussed in Chapter Four, the participants were from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and their ages ranged from 15 to 26. The narratives that emerged told a different story than the prevailing narrative that policymakers recount, where young people can passively be sorted and channelled into the most economically optimal destinations.

Instead, the varying experiences of participants illustrated complex and non-linear educational choices rather than calculated straightforward ones. In Saudi Arabia, the importance of upholding social institutions and structures (e.g. family, tribal relationships, gender) was explicitly articulated, but the motivations behind this were not always as clear to the students, and the benefits of holding these traditional forms of social organisation were murky for many. While these social institutions represented safety and familiarity, they also contributed to the perpetuation of embedded restrictions that prevented some young people from broadening their educational and career prospects. Young people's decisions were influenced by and made with the support of their family and people they trusted. The participants considered the premium of pursuing an educational pathway that diverged from their family's aspirations and feared the social sanctions that resulted from challenging the status quo. They interpreted the social meanings attached to different types of education, specialisations, and access to employment in different ways depending on three main social factors: social and family relationships, financial resources and gender.

In Chapter Five we saw the way young people tended to paint TVET in a predominantly negative light. Through discussions of TVET four overarching narratives emerged through the analysis of the participants' accounts: the last resort, the career stopper, the second chance and the welcome alternative. Experiences of transitions within secondary school generated a negative narrative of TVET. Without family legacies in vocational fields, TVET was seen as a pathway that should be avoided; a 'last resort' option. This negativity was in part attributable to its status as a refuge for low-attaining students in secondary schools or as a potential backup plan for students applying to universities at the tertiary level. Some reports estimate that 94% of students prefer universities over COTs, and statistics indicate that only around 55% of applicants are successful (See Sections 2.8.2 and 2.9). The participants were educated in a comprehensive system that boosted their confidence and optimism about opportunities that awaited them after secondary school. The scarcity of encounters

with experienced trusted adults or careers guidance counsellors to discuss their futures during secondary tended to conceal the complexity of post-secondary navigation, and did little to dispel the sentiment that there was one route for winners with high attainment, and another for failures, rather than many valuable post-secondary opportunities available in various forms.

The long shadow of the narrative of TVET as a 'last resort' led to a 'career stopper' narrative, fed by the idea that TVET would trap young people in low-level employment. This narrative was supported by the visible characteristics of a labour market saturated with foreign workers in employment fields related to TVET. As locals, the participants mostly expected to gain government positions and based their knowledge of opportunities on the local and historical patterns that they had observed throughout their lives. The low demand for TVET has its own implications, as it re-enforces and perpetuates a negative status to the field. Students perceived TVET as less favourable and lower status, and one for other people. These sentiments helped address the research question about the way perceptions of career opportunities influence aspirations and helped illuminate the strong influence of socially constructed perceptions on career choices.

A fear of pursuing TVET was also attributed to an opinion that accepting a role in TVET would signal their previous academic failures or their hesitation in decision-making to potential employers. A riskier delve into the labour market directly out of secondary was thus sometimes seen as a safer move if university was not available. Participants described their experiences of rejecting positions and job offers because they feared that by pursuing jobs which they believed carried negative social connotations, they would be shrinking their career prospects and compromising their social status. For instance, working for a prestigious multinational as a low-regarded welder was an opportunity that was rejected if working as a well-regarded safety officer in a more volatile local company was available. The 'career stopper' narrative illustrated that the participants did not only see TVET as limiting, but they believed it was determining.

The last two narratives that emerged were the 'second chance' and 'welcome alternative'. Fewer participants described their experiences as positive, and most of these students experienced a turning point that shifted the narrative for them. For some, an experience of failure in another educational or career setting led them to TVET where they encountered a newfound appreciation for the fields and instruction. For others, the fear of failure in an academic setting led them to TVET. The less negative experiences of TVET highlighted the appreciation individuals had of TVET regardless of the family and social perceptions of TVET. However, despite a personal realization that TVET was beneficial and favourable, the fear of stigma persisted, and the participants would constantly look for justification for being in TVET. They believed that they had let their parents down, but they also believed that they would be able to prove to their families that they still had a chance to succeed at something.

7.1.1 Social influences

Chapter Six explored the social structures and institutions which shaped the narratives that emerged from the young participants' experiences. This chapter discussed the role of family and gender in shaping aspirations and influencing choices. It also highlighted the different kinds and levels of capital (i.e. financial, cultural and social capital) that influenced the way the relationships facilitated or hindered their choices. The participants described family expectations about traditional gender roles that they were striving to uphold. For young men, pursuing TVET was seen as risky as it signalled to others that they either failed at or gave up the potential to gain a prestigious academic certification and job in the future, which framed them as poor husbands and breadwinners. Families were willing to use their social capital in the form of *wastas* to guarantee positions that were believed to match their aspirations for their children. This led to an unequal playing field for those who did not have a good *wasta*, but also led to less agency for the young person, as they would realise that without the *wasta* their

opportunities would decrease in light of the rules that govern social privilege, access and reciprocity in Saudi Arabia, and would therefore conform to their expected roles.

For young women, pursuing TVET was not functional, as they often did not envision themselves working in related jobs, but instead prioritised fulfilling their role as primary caretakers in the home. The women shared that they would most likely pursue careers outside the home if society did not define their social roles so rigidly but that they feared judgement. Some of those who were not yet responsible for a home viewed TVET institutes as a safe, female-only space to socialise and build social relationships. They also believed that pursuing TVET would give them access to skills that were in demand in the labour market, in case they were inadvertently put in the undesirable 'breadwinner' position. The young women wanted to have skills that would make them employable, but often did not actually plan to work, and if they did, most would only pursue employment that fit the 'acceptable' social stipulations. This included working in female-only and female-appropriate workspaces and fields. Furthermore, these positions would only be pursued if they would not interfere with the woman's primary role as a wife and mother and dutiful daughter.

While the findings of this study cannot be generalised, the rich and intimate qualitative data, collected through prolonged interviews in person and online reveals varying degrees of influence that social structures have on decision-makers in the form of *wastas*, gender expectations and family responsibilities. The findings raise questions about the ability of young people to play an active role in their decision-making process in Saudi Arabia by shedding light on the extent of constraints associated with persistent social structures and labour market factors.

7.2 The illusion of choice: The strength of social boundaries

This research questioned the influence of structural institutions on individuals' TVET choices, and the data helped illustrate the complex relationship between individual perceptions and the social structures they are situated in. Rather than working to

transcend boundaries, limits and restrictions, the educational and career choices of young people in Saudi Arabia appear to reinforce the strength and influence of the limits and restrictions of social institutions. The relationship is reflexive, and the two sides of the process-the individual and the society they live in-continually influence each other. According to Evans (2007) individual dispositions are located within objective social structures, and these dispositions are what act as a mediation between structure and practice. Therefore, understanding the way that these dispositions influence action is essential to envisioning the extent to which individuals are capable of carving out a space separate from restrictive structures to make their own decisions. Hodkinson et al.'s (1997) theory of career decision-making challenges the premise that decisions are made in a purely objective, rational manner, showing that life circumstances are internalised and that embedded social norms make the process both subjective and objective. Instead of looking at decision-making as a logical process that involves a consideration of strengths and weaknesses that help achieve a specific long-term aim or career goal, decisions are:

Grounded in the culture and identities of young people...bounded by horizons for action...determined by the external job or educational opportunities in interaction with personal perceptions of what's possible, desirable or appropriate. These perceptions, in turn, were derived from their culture and life histories (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996, p. 123).

Building on the premise that opportunities are both subjective and objective, Evans (2007) concludes that young people make their own decisions, but these continue to be bounded by cultural and social structures. Evans' concept of 'bounded agency' comes as a response to the shift toward a post-post-modern interpretation of society conceptualised by Anthony Giddens and known as the age of 'late modernity' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Giddens views modern institutions as dynamic, and illustrates ways in which modern institutions change the traditional form of risks from ones that were borne from nature to ones that are a result of human organisation (Giddens, 1991a). It

is through shifts toward a late modern society that the importance of traditional modes of social organisation, such as the family, cease to act as the most powerful influence on of action despite their perpetual power. Beck takes this idea further with his Individualization Thesis (Beck, 1994), wherein he interprets this late modern era as one characterised by a breakdown of traditional social structures and a time where previous limits of class, gender and race are rendered insignificant. Instead, young people, often benefitting from prolonged transitions into adulthood due to increased access to education, are more responsible for themselves. In turn, young people now bear the responsibility and the burdens of their choices. While Diepstraten, du Bois-Reymond and Vinken (2006) describe this as young people writing their own 'choice biographies'; i.e. an opportunity to break from traditional constraints and class labels and a space to write one's own life story, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) believe in an epistemological fallacy of the Individualisation Thesis which has blindsided many to the challenges resulting from the absence of social networks and capital that carved a place for young people in their social group. In a more extreme response to the ideas of Individualisation, Roberts (2009) asserts that any choice that is available is constrained by the social structures that define and limit opportunities, and any choice can only happen within the constraints and boundaries of social and institutional structures. Roberts (2009) questions structures and inequalities rather than individuals as he views their role as inherently marginalised. Although useful for understanding the spectrum of structure and agency, these theories do not uncover the different role of agency within the Saudi educational and career choice journey.

7.2.1 Pragmatic choices

The theory of Careership, developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) models decision-making in a way which assumes that decisions are both objective and subjective, and that choices are made based on what lay within an individual's horizon for action (See Figure 7-1). The extent to which future education and career opportunities

are considered by young people depended on whether or not they fall within their 'horizons for action', and their view of acceptability and availability of choices are based on the influence of habitus, field and change (Hodkinson, 1998). Hodkinson et al. describe horizons for action as binding a person's decision making, since only options that are within what is visible from a person's position within the education and work fields are considered. Available opportunities that fall outside of one's horizon for action are not considered by them at all. As Hodkinson describes it:

Career decision-making and development are enabled within horizons for action and constrained or prevented beyond them. The horizons for action are influenced by a person's position, by the nature of the field or fields within which they are positioned, and the embodied dispositions of the person him/herself. (2008, p.4)

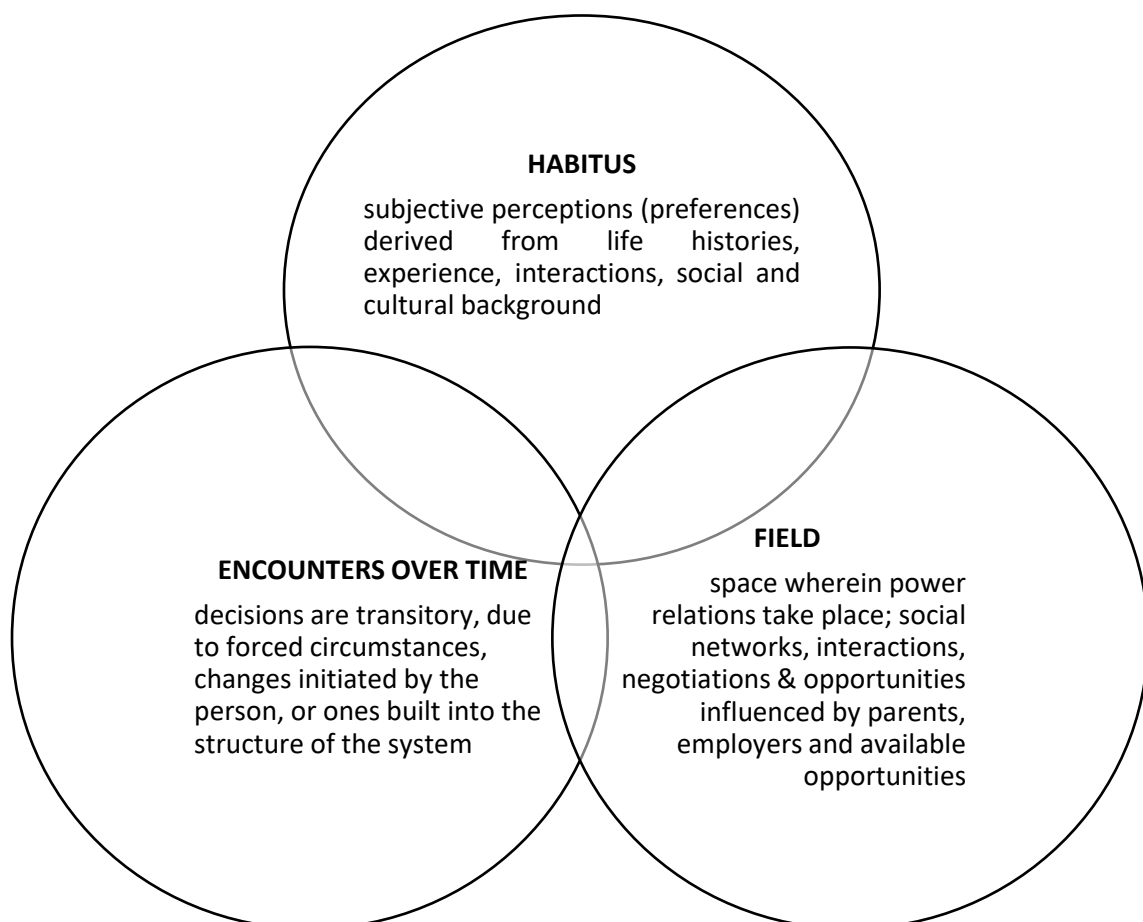


Figure 7-1 Careership (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996)

This has served as a useful lens for uncovering the different components of decision-making in Saudi Arabia. The variations in context and the way components of habitus and field shape young Saudis' horizons are essential to understanding the way young people view choice and make decisions. The effect of the overlapping habitus, field and life-course components are complex. Understanding the relationships and power structures between the different elements of habitus and field, and the social sanctions related to changes and turning points throughout the life course would uncover how essential certain kinds of capital are to be able to achieve a pragmatic decision at all. Through a deeper understanding of the way horizons for action are formulated, we can paint a clearer picture of the constraints on choice, and achieve a deeper understanding of the reflexive relationship between individual action and structural barriers.

The participants' choices within the education-to-work field were evidence for the three overlapping elements of Hodkinson et al.'s pragmatic decision-making: they were influenced by individual life histories and cultural capital, they were mediated by objective characteristics of the education-to-work field, and decisions were not fixed or permanent, but changed in reaction to different life events and happenstance. These overlapping elements framed the participants' 'horizons for action', which shaped their decisions and helped unpack the relative influence of objective forces in the educational transition field as well as the way individual dispositions are shaped and opportunities are co-created. Although the participants in my research appeared constrained by their horizons for action, the evidence also supports an argument that the constraints were not iron-clad, and the choices that the young people made within these boundaries were influential in shaping and re-shaping horizons as they progressed and experienced different opportunities or restrictions along the education-to-work pathway.

7.2.2 Individual dispositions

Individual dispositions are shaped by one's family background and life history. Hodkinson (2008) highlights the dual nature of dispositions as both tacit and embodied, as well as deeply engrained. Dispositions are framed by subconscious ways of viewing and understanding the objective world which develop throughout a person's life and are influential in the way these subjective understandings translate into the physical world of work. Individual dispositions are shaped by interactions within the field, understood throughout this research through the concept of Bourdieu's habitus: the set of beliefs, principles and individual actions that are internalised by an individual while engaged in a dialectical relationship with the objective world (social structures) so that one's behaviours reconstruct the social structures in which they live. For Bourdieu, habitus and field perpetually interact with one another to frame dispositions and shape opportunities. Bourdieu highlights how decisions are related to, and reinforce historical concepts of norms and expectations within the field:

It is an operator of rationality, but of a practical rationality immanent in a historical system of social relations and therefore transcendent to the individual. The strategies it "manages" are systemic, yet ad hoc because they are "triggered" by the encounter with a particular field. Habitus is creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures, which are the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced it (Bourdieu and Wacquant p.19).

Habitus allows us to see social actors as co-creators of their social landscapes. Guided by these concepts, Hodkinson et al. highlight the importance of recognizing the individual's influence on the field, and the role that individual decisions play in shaping perceptions. In the above quote, Bourdieu describes the practical nature of habitus as a set of strategies to manage an individual's position within society as they encounter different players and objective systems. For my participants, dispositions are embodied and related to physical experiences: the few participants who grew up in households where family members performed vocational jobs were more likely to see TVET as a

'welcome alternative', and envision themselves physically performing the jobs, for instance. Similarly, despite opportunities for work outside the home with the vocational qualifications, many young women could not envision themselves physically working in an environment where men were present because of established cultural norms of gender segregation that shaped their aspirations. Although limited by the objective structures of the field, habitus influences what this looks like and the creative ways of navigating through the objective structures allow for the field to be shaped and reshaped through continuous encounters. To what extent then, do young people in Saudi Arabia use their agency to create new pathways, and to what extent are their actions reproducing social institutions?

7.2.3 Agency within the field

The Saudi education-to-work field is characterised by the relational interactions between students, their parents, policymakers, education providers, labour markets, and influenced by pervasive social structures, as well as globalising economic forces. The negative view of TVET that was illustrated through the narratives of 'last resort' and 'career stopper' show evidence of the influence of the labour market field on the dispositions of the participants and the way the stakeholders within the field influence youth's aspirations and choices. In their efforts to achieve economic development goals and motivated by the global skills and knowledge economy rhetoric (See Section 3.6), policymakers construct specific job routes for young people and assume a technically rational educational transition. The opportunities are set up with the assumption of a linear pathway, as evidenced by the *Horizons* program that sets target percentages for student certification programs, as well as the restrictions on tertiary admissions, and the way universities offer different specializations to men and women (See Section 2.7 and 2.8). Although the pathways are designed with 'one-way' routes to specific destinations, the data revealed how the participants used their agency to try to find 'backroads' to deal with the more complex nature of transitions. When the linear pathway established by

policymakers contradicts desired destinations that fall within each young person's horizon for action, individuals tend to utilise the social, cultural or economic capital at their disposal. The respondents described their aspirations for academic education and their aversion toward TVET in relation to the objective availability of jobs in the labour market, and how they would subjectively see themselves in these jobs. The distinctions were both conscious as well as subconsciously guided by tacit 'practical' knowledge (Giddens and Dallmayr, 1982) that accumulated over time in the form of cultural capital (See Section 3.3). When asked, many of the participants considered some pathways to be unacceptable and 'last resort' options even if they couldn't describe what these pathways were and what the resulting opportunities of pursuing them would be. The internalised negative viewpoint of TVET was thus a result of transmitted social definitions that classified TVET as undesirable.

Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) note that while technically rational decisions would be an individual feat, pragmatic decisions are made by multiple people, and the tacit knowledge about different options was shaped by the 'normative expectations' of adults within their networks (Harrison and Waller, 2018). Pragmatic decisions are not linear and straightforward, they are messier, and are part of the development of habitus. Decision-making is a culturally embedded activity and therefore is not an individual activity. In addition to the subconscious embedded cultural influences on decision-making, most of the participants' decisions included an external component and young people made choices in consultation with their families. They often based their decisions on anecdotal information from 'hot sources' (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000) rather than thoroughly researched 'official knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998). The comprehensive secondary education system and the lack of formal careers guidance led to students' reliance on trusted individuals' advice, leading to a sense of security for many, and a feeling that they will be taken care of, by their family members and their access to networks, and they therefore do not need to be more active, especially since they feel little room to do so. With access to this kind of social capital,

where parents and family assist in the decision-making (or take the lead), young people are more likely to meet the standards of success set by society. However, by deferring their choice to the family unit, which holds the social capital, the young people's opportunities were restricted. Family recommendations and guidance was based on the 'symbolic values' attached to some careers and pathways rather than the individual's preference or the potential value of the career options. For young people, pushing back against traditions and norms appears to always remain bound by definitions of acceptability, albeit with varying degrees.

7.2.4 Social positions and dispositions

Young women's dispositions were embodied in the form of work they performed and would accept (See Chapter Six). They tended to describe their future roles in primarily caretaking or administrative fields, often admitting that they were investing several years in their education despite knowing that they would not apply this practically in the workplace. The day to day lived experiences of young women demonstrated that their added value was more appreciated in their role in the home. Their new and potential selves as employees participating in male workplaces did not seem to represent their 'authentic self' (Reay *et al.*, 2001) and they therefore continued to be systematically excluded—thus participating in the reproduction of gendered roles. The notion that young people believe they have an 'authentic self', i.e. a specific and proper place in the world stems from Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence.

For Bourdieu, society is designed to show young people their place in society. The system in which people live creates norms which are hard to challenge without repercussions. In the Saudi context, where women traditionally do not work, the system tells them from a young age that they are not suitable to work. The social structure communicates this to them, and they feel that their ideal place is in the home. Because they then feel that they will not fit in, the participants spoke of opting out of work opportunities. The young women's horizons were thus also restricted by their own

perceptions of their potential value as well as their families' perceptions, and the predominant one in their social circles. Their families did not consider them for scholarships, their medical careers were interrupted by marriage, and they chose specialisations that would allow them to work in female-only spaces, if they were to work at all. Women's unequal access is thus co-created by them, both consciously and subconsciously.

Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence and the notion of an authentic self falls short in shedding light on the experience of young men in Saudi Arabia. Because of their socially perceived place in society as being more deserving of work placements, most young men aspire to higher education in order to access work regardless of their social status. This is in contrast to the young men in Diane Reay's study who do not feel that they belong in higher education because of their backgrounds, and that their authentic selves would be realised in vocational training instead (Reay *et al.*, 2001). By contrast, for the young Saudi men who do go into TVET, they do not believe it is inevitable, instead they see it as a result of an unjust system, and they utilise their social and financial capital to try to find a way out of TVET. Most try to opt out of TVET because they do not feel that it allows them to be their authentic selves.

For the majority of Saudis, higher education does not represent a place that is reserved for the privileged, but more as one for the lucky and for those who were blessed by God (See Section 2.4). Those who were lucky to successfully navigate through barriers and prerequisites tend to get seats in higher education. However, if presented with the opportunity, most students would pursue it regardless of their social backgrounds. Those who do remain in TVET often lack necessary social capital, and these young men may feel similar to the young men in Reay's study: that they are not clever enough to work in something else.

To further understand the view young people have of their 'appropriate' positions, it is useful to explore the restricted nature of occupational choices for each gender. Colley *et al.* (2003) describe how restricted occupational choices lead young people to 'cool out'

of ambitions and re-envision their identities to suit a social and culturally constructed suitable position. Their dispositions are shaped by social expectations and transmitted as cultural capital. Young women in this study, for instance, developed skills related to household management and caretaking and would happily enrol in office management or business administration or interior decorating, as these could enhance their role in managing their own homes.

In their discussion of the process of learning in VET, Colley *et al.* (2003) introduce the concept of 'vocational habitus', where a learner in a vocational setting begins to adopt the identity of the role he/she is training for, and therefore begins to aspire to dispositions that are demanded by the vocational culture. These learners are not passive, but actively choose the vocational identity if it falls within their horizon for action, and the learner negotiates the tensions between their realised selves and the idealised 'right person for the job' (Colley *et al.*, 2003, p. 489). Both the young men and women in my study show a desire to actively acculturate into their roles, and in doing so, they reinforce stereotypically male and female roles, and prioritise maintaining relationships over creating their own identity. If the participants of this study are similar to the ones in that of Colley *et al.* (2003), then young people are able to exert their agency in deliberately trying to fit into their roles, but that agency is thus used to reinforce social definitions of what these roles should be.

The participants' aspirations begin high, but the lack of available destinations tends to depress these as they navigate through available pathways. Those who have strong relationships with their families and access to *wastas* and financial resources have a greater advantage, but still tend to have little say in their final destinations. Gender expectations and pressures further shape their aspirations, and when the aspirations contradict established norms, these pressures restrict their ability to follow personal aspirations. While some may be able to exert more agency through successful attainment and perhaps small business efforts, the larger restrictive framework of external pressure and expectations is limiting and influential.

7.2.5 The influence of social structures

Decision-making is an experience that is shaped by the context it takes place in. In this thesis, I have assumed that the level of choice in decision-making sits on a spectrum between agency and structure, i.e. between an independent choice, motivated by internal ambitions and free of constraints, and a choice that is guided, influenced and controlled by external factors and a commitment to those influencing factors, regardless of one's consciousness of the influence. Despite a global shift away from pre-determined social positions and expectations, for young Saudis decision-making remains a deeply embedded social practice, and choices are perpetually determined by social factors. This thesis has shown that in acting on social pressures and fulfilling expectations, these young people are complicit in re-enforcing their pre-determined range of future education and work options.

For young Saudis, external structural expectations regarding education and career choice are varied, but are clustered along three main axes: economic, social and cultural. Careers are viewed in light of these social institutions and pursuing careers that do not meet the criteria that is acceptable within your own social groups (i.e. ones that lay outside your horizon for action), can lead to social ostracisation and rejection. The risks of being ostracised and excluded are grave in a society that values social capital above other types such as academic or financial capital. In the case of Saudi Arabia, diverting away from social expectations can mean complete isolation from a pool of resources that are essential for daily life. In a country that was founded on tribal relationships and allegiances, there is little room for individuality. The value that is attributed to individuality is more often than not aligned with socially, economically and culturally accepted conventions. Therefore, any decision that challenges the status quo is unpragmatic in nature.

Despite policy-makers' economically driven HCT approach, there was a dissonant relationship between the government's view and society's view of career appropriateness and desirability. The individual is thus pulled in one direction by

institutional availability of opportunity and in another direction by social pressures. The data suggests that social pressures are so deeply embedded that they are much stronger than institutional pull, and their embedded nature means that they are often undetectable.

Participants tended to choose routes that were ‘familially acceptable’ (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000, p. 71). However, this did not lead to automatic ‘social reproduction’, as it was not necessarily related to a legacy of what the family did but was related to symbolic status that was derived from historical parallels. For example, Mohammed, who we met in Chapter Six explained how important it was to his father that he do well in school. At the same time, his father had no formal schooling and did not read or write, and expected Mohammed to work on his farm as a child, which led Mohammed to fall asleep in classes. His father did not ask after his grades, but if he were to find out that he was not doing well, Mohammed was punished. The father expected his son to be able to bring pride to the family and claimed bragging rights for his son’s successes. Doing well in school would perhaps lead to upwards social mobility, but Mohammed explained that his father expected him to follow his line of work, and only wanted Mohammed to do well so he could boast about his skills to fellow clan members. Arwa (F, 26, COT student) also stated that her mother expected her to go to university because her friends’ daughter was going. The symbolic and cultural value of ‘success’ is not always related to a specific type of job, but more related to labels of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in the eyes of others in society.

Although the minority in the sample, the ‘welcome alternative’ students were willing to go into TVET because they were already ‘embedded’ in TVET (Ball et al. 2000) due to their personal family histories or personal work experience that they had. Hashim (M, 21, COT student), for instance, said that he had always wanted to be a network engineer and therefore pursued it. Similarly, Tammam (M, 17, Secondary Industrial Institute) aspired to be a mechanic and own his own car shop because his brother owned one (See Section 5.5). Having experienced TVET formed their perception of TVET as an

appropriate pathway, falling within their horizon for action. However, most of these students had accumulated the needed cultural capital to succeed in a TVET field, and for many of them, having access to a network of individuals within the TVET field meant that they envisioned specific future jobs, working for themselves or with people that they knew. The preference for TVET was embodied because it was part of their life history. For the other participants, going into TVET was a result of their disadvantaged position within social hierarchies. As Hodkinson (2008) reminds us, “How we perceive of our position is part of that position, and influences how we can and do act” (p. 9).

Those ‘second chance’ participants, who may not have chosen it at first but then enrolled in TVET, often described it in very different terms than those on the outside who formed opinions based on a dominant narrative rather than an experience. TVET was described by the second chancers as inclusive and empowering for those who failed elsewhere. The participants draw on their cultural capital that was shaped by their families and family histories, and the previous experiences of education that they had. There is an assumed uniformity of learning within vocational settings that ignore the role of individuals inside learning institutions, or how these change over time (Bloomer *et al.*, 1997). James (2011) describes “learning cultures” as places in which learning takes place, and that while policies and systems structure what happens in individual academic or vocational programs, structural theories discount how these are reshaped at the local level by individual tutors, managers and students according to their dispositions, values or preferences. We are reminded by Bloomer *et al.* (1997) that learning can only be understood in context, and the nature of learning contributes to the success of the learning culture, and the possibilities for people in them (James, 2011). Colley *et al.* (2003) remind us that teaching and learning are primarily social and cultural rather than individual and technical activities; they should therefore be studied in authentic settings; this in turn means addressing their complexity through a cultural perspective on the interrelationships between individual dispositions and agency, and institutional and structural contexts.

So, to answer the research question: how do young people's subjective perceptions of career opportunities influence their career aspirations and choices in relation to TVET? Many of the participants' perceptions of TVET shifted as a result of encounters along their transition pathway. Chances that presented themselves and happenstance allowed for new options to be considered (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999). It is through the turning points that young people become more aware of the constraining nature of social institutions on their decisions. When young people are successful at following a pre-determined educational transition pathway, they were proud of the achievement. For those who encountered obstacles to reaching a pathway that lay within their horizon, their aspirations were depressed, but their horizons were widened, as they now were put in a position where they had to consider jobs that they may not have in the past. This narrative of 'second chance' fed into the 'welcome alternative' narrative. As for the question about the influence of structural institutions on decisions, even with the notion of a welcome alternative, young people's perception of TVET remained mostly negative, as socially embedded beliefs were difficult to overcome. This was exacerbated by the experience young people had of the finality of their choices. Many decisions were determining, and TVET created a path dependency, that once some decisions were made, there was little room to start over again.

7.3 'Colouring' inside the 'lines': agency within structural boundaries

To explain the influence of structure on young Saudis' individual education and career choice, I imagine the career decision-making as a paint-by-numbers canvas. Rather than a blank slate, almost everyone is given a template, divided into different shapes and sizes to colour in. The numbered sections progress as time progresses in people's lives. Young people need to use the resources that they have in order to colour in their template; these resources range in quality and quantity and influence the level of detail and the elaborate nature of their template. Those who can afford a set of 120 artist-

quality oil pastels, and know how to use them, would certainly be able to colour a much more elaborate future than someone that would need to settle for a set of jumbo crayons. A fine tip marker allows for meticulous details and broken coloured pencils with no sharpener can mean blank streaks running through the bits of colour forced on to the page. Colours represent the ability to access resources, the kind of resources that are accessible, and a person's ability to use them. In this way, colours are the equivalent of social capital, and the different 'shades' of capital you have access to are often available as a result of your social position. Whichever colours you can access influences your ability to exercise more agency, more individual choice, albeit always within the pre-set template of acceptable routes, carefully following the numbered shapes. Some people are born with the resources, others acquire them over time and can enhance their artwork. However, not colouring within the lines, or turning over the paper to draw on a blank template, leaves young people unable to create a recognisable future, and is therefore often rejected. The following two stories show how this analogy helps explain young people's experiences:

7.3.1.1 *Sameera*

Sameera was a 25-year old woman with a Bachelor's degree in Maths, who was studying for a diploma in accounting from the local COT in a small city in the Eastern Province. Both of her parents were primary school educated, and her father worked as a security guard in the national oil company while her mother was a homemaker. Sameera was a very optimistic and happy young woman. She had high aspirations and loved the training program, describing how the applied nature of accounting was much more engaging than her university maths degree. She described her father's pride in her achieving her Bachelor's degree, and her influence on her sister to follow her lead and enrol in university. In order to achieve her training diploma, she interned at a private sector company that was mixed-gender, the growing norm in Saudi private sector workplaces. Sameera explained that she was now engaged, and because her fiancé did not want her to work in a mixed gender company, she would no longer pursue a career outside the

home. In ten years, she envisioned herself a homemaker, but that if her husband and his family changed their mind, she may change hers as well. She describes her future self as a successful woman and a happy mother. She also said she would frame and hang her qualifications in her living room.

As a young woman, Sameera was handed a canvas that depicted her as an educated homemaker. With moderately educated parents, she was given resources, a set of basic colours, she went to a public school and due to her own attainment, was able to attend the local university. In spending more time colouring in these sections, Sameera was using her resources to acquire new colours and build relationships in university and at the college. Similar to many young women in the study, she did not value education for its functional role as a means to employment, but as a means to gain status and resources. She did not swiftly finish her paint-by-number canvas, and made a choice to differentiate her canvas, adding her own colours. However, Sameera could no longer paint over the sections, she invested time in, and when it was time, she moved on to the next section. She had gained some new resources that she knew would be available to her if circumstances changed in the future, but the socially defined next-steps were unavoidable at this juncture, and she used her basic colours to continue to fill out the pre-determined canvas and submitted to the expectation to fulfil her role as a caretaker.

7.3.1.2 *Thamer*

Thamer was a 25-year old young man, originally from the Southern Province who was studying electronics at a COT in a large city in the Eastern Province. He owned and managed two restaurants alongside his studies. Neither of Thamer's parents were able to read or write. His father worked in agriculture, most likely in small-scale farming and animal trade, and his mother was a homemaker. Thamer was a very proud and outspoken young man. He was not interested in education and described his studies as a procedural nuisance that he must achieve, although he admits that he enjoys the college and the relationships he is building with his classmates and trainers. Thamer did

not get accepted to the local university after secondary school due to a low overall secondary GPA and instead began pursuing independent work. He moved to the Southern Province and tried to manage small projects for his father. He described this as difficult, as his relationships were much stronger in the city he grew up in. He describes his passion for commerce but admits that the pressure he faced by his father and brother to pursue a training diploma had benefitted him, since after working he realised how much society valued qualifications, even if he views them as unnecessary. Thamer describes culture and traditions as enabling and values relationships. He has a very positive outlook on life, believing in his business success, and appreciating that a diploma may help him get a government job if things do not go according to plan.

Similar to Sameera, Thamer utilised his resources to slowly colour in his canvas template. However, his template differed due to the different social norms and expectations for young men and women. Like other young men in the study, and in stark contrast to most of the young women, Thamer was looking for financial success and thus did not value education beyond a functional mechanism to gain employment or recognition in the labour market. Thamer was given valuable social capital resources and was able to utilise this capital by going to work in his village when he was denied access to university. This allowed him to paint in the sections of his canvas and progress toward adulthood without feeling that he met a solid roadblock. His weak educational position would not stand in his way of gaining employment or access to work because he worked to cultivate his social capital further. However, Thamer wanted to gain access beyond the resources he was dealt and began his own company. He continued to colour in his canvas with his own colours, but also followed the instructions from his parents and continued colour within the lines. If his entrepreneurial ventures did not work, he knew the only trajectory he had was in government employment. While this was not what he aspired to, he admitted that he would pursue it in order to mitigate the risk of colouring too far outside the lines and losing access to the opportunities that his social network could help him access.

Sameera and Thamer both have aspirations that are independent of the template they are given and use their resources to paint their own version of a pre-determined path. In this way, young people do have room to make choices, but these choices remain bound by the limits set by social and cultural norms and expectations and institutional transition pathways. The two young Saudis' stories show how horizons for action frame choices, and how going against family wishes may be contemplated but is often disregarded. Rather than transcend cultural limitations, the choices Sameera and Thamer have made illustrate the way young people make pragmatic choices, which in the context of Saudi Arabia re-enforce limits to individual agency and embed restrictions even deeper within the social fabric.

7.4 Re-thinking routes into TVET

The participants' views of TVET reflect a disjuncture between the objectives of the TVET system (See Section 2.8) and the aspirations of young Saudis. The majority of the participants viewed TVET as an unpragmatic choice and utilised social capital available to them to try and avoid it if possible. Despite the overarching policy narrative in Saudi Arabia based on the HCT assumption that people will make decisions that will maximise economic returns, the young people in this research revealed the strength of social structures and cultural and individual life histories in shaping perceptions and aspirations. Policy efforts to increase participation appear to be economically motivated and focus on behaviour characteristics such as resilience (See Chapter Two), placing the burden of responsibility to achieve socially defined measures of success on the individuals. These policies do not sufficiently consider restrictive social circumstances within which decision-makers choose. Despite failed efforts to route young people down certain pathways, it appears that policymakers have not turned their attention to the social context for explanations. Current policy advocates for increased investments in building infrastructure to grow education and career opportunities in private sector industries believed to be the most economically successful in the future (Al-Kibsi *et al.*,

2015). However, the data presented here has shown that young people's aspirations often do not fall within these industries. Young people aspire to public sector employment or jobs that provide status. Private sector jobs are not trusted and young people have described a desire to work for themselves rather than for a privately owned company that may not value their qualifications or their aspirations fairly. Private sector companies also fail to acknowledge the suitability of their facilities for the young people themselves, or their families, resulting in additional barriers to participation, particularly for young women. While economic motivations factor into the education and decision-making of young people, social and cultural factors tend to outweigh them. Young people utilise the social capital that they have at their disposal, like *wastas* and marriage roles, to navigate through the opportunities available to them, striving for chances that lay within their horizons for action and align with their *habitus*, allowing them to maintain their social status at least.

The reasons that some jobs lay outside young people's horizons for action must be considered in greater depth in order to address the difficulties faced in effectively achieving Saudisation efforts. When an education or career opportunity does not allow a young person to fulfil his/her expected social role, then those routes are avoided, and when available, social capital is used to successfully circumnavigate the limiting routes that policymakers attempt to push young people down. Those who do not have access to social capital also try to avoid these limits, but often cannot.

The current structure and quality of TVET provision is not addressed in the same way that the policies surrounding TVET are. There are limited job opportunities in the current Saudi labour market for those with TVET certifications, however, little is done to alter the training quality or specializations, qualification titles, and the resulting availability of jobs. The inability to pursue other kinds of education after enrolling in TVET creates a restrictive path dependency. On the other hand, the participants in this study highlighted aspirations to secure employment, social and health benefits and, as the participants frequently mentioned, a job that would give them social status. They also seek

opportunities with transparent salary scales and fair progression opportunities. This study has shown that many young people view TVET positively after experiencing a form of technical or vocational training. However, it has also shown that these young people are reluctant to go into TVET as a result of its symbolic status. The narratives of second chance and welcome alternative highlight many aspects of TVET that are appreciated, but when presented against the backdrop of being for the lower achieving and failing students, the struggle to appeal to a wider audience will persist. The qualification from a technical college in Saudi Arabia is defined as a 'middle diploma' (See Chapter Two). The currency of the qualifications in the labour market vary based on the awarding college or polytechnic. From the students' discussions, the smaller COTs were easier to get into and therefore less prestigious, and the more difficult larger COTs were believed to provide greater access to employment. The same would be said of the different specializations—most students aspired to pursue an administrative or computing specialization, and wanted to avoid more hands-on work such as welding or mechanics. The polytechnics and semi-governmental institutes founded in partnership with the private sector were the most coveted of these institutions as they guaranteed employment upon completion of the certification, but as mentioned by the participants, were very difficult to gain access to. As one student had put it, you would need the father of *wastas* to get accepted into them (See Section 6.1.2).

7.4.1 Defining the role of TVET

The lessons learnt from many European countries' adoption of hybrid qualifications structures could prove helpful for the Saudi context. Although very different, Saudi Arabia's TVET system shares some similarities with the English one, where the academic-vocational divide is longstanding. While the social contexts and the issues vary considerably, such as the age at which vocational training becomes available as well as the class-differentiated nature of young people's transitions, both societies share a lower status view of TVET and consider it less desirable than academic routes. The

quality of training varies due to lack of standardised pathways, and in both systems vocational pathways are more loosely connected to the labour market than in other contexts (Davey and Fuller, 2013). A vocational 'middle diploma' is one of the only alternatives for young people with no access to university in Saudi Arabia (if there is capacity). This has very little currency in the labour market and is sometimes used to discriminate against those holding the certification. Therefore, the vocational route needs to be strengthened, and the level, similar to the English context, needs to be enhanced to meet labour market standards. Furthermore, opening the vocational route up for progression into higher education (at any university and not only in the COTs as is the current structure) would overcome the sense of finality that young people who do pursue TVET experience. Addressing the journey as well as the destinations would help re-define the field to be more attractive (See Section 3.1).

The economic focus on skills and qualifications frameworks has led to a global path dependency approach to the relationship between skills, occupations and industries (Guile and Unwin, 2019). The result has been a continuous disregard for the quality of VET and the potential benefits of creating expertise within TVET. Saudi Arabia replicates these efforts to make TVET more attractive or change mindsets in order to achieve economic success, ignoring the way TVET expertise can enhance and transform industries from within. Guile and Unwin (2019) argue that policymakers view TVET through a primarily educational lens, and are pre-occupied with the notion of what to do with underachieving students, thus neglecting the relationship of TVET and work, and the potential TVET offers in transforming the future of work, and thus economic development. This approach to re-envisioning TVET as a potential area for ongoing learning and re-conceiving expertise rather than a blue-collar skills production site would be extremely beneficial in the Saudi context. Chanquesliani, Relly and Laczik (2016) examine ways that efforts to enhance the status of TVET, such as skills competitions, tend to exacerbate the deficit model of TVET rather than transcend the status through a focus on excellence within institutes. Considering the short history of TVET in Saudi

Arabia, it is not an impossible feat to distance the industry from traditional notions of 'craftsmanship' that determine social status (See Sections 2.6-2.9). Saudi Arabia's continuous efforts to provide mediocre level education within TVET institutes for those who cannot access academic education within the current educational structure has led to repeated failures in 'shifting the mindset' that the current approach to policy not only created, but perpetuates through its definition of TVET.

Since this research illuminated the complex sentiments Saudis have toward TVET, looking at ways to address some of the biggest reservations, i.e. the 'dead end' and 'career stopper' nature of the qualifications could help transform the sector. Even when young people do not want to progress into higher education, the fact that path dependency blocks someone who pursues a vocational qualification from a future route into higher education remains one of the biggest obstacles. The current structure communicates a message that those who pursue TVET will be stuck and have failed. Presenting more flexibility and the opportunity for a future shift in education or career choice may address some of the biggest concerns that Saudi society has with TVET, even more so than the nature of the VET specializations themselves. Additionally, strengthening the quality of the qualifications through stronger links to the labour market, similar to the current polytechnics and the semi-governmental organisations would allow for a different view of the provisions.

7.4.2 The influence of gender

Finally, acknowledging the gendered variations in responses from young men and women is an essential component to re-imagining ways that TVET opportunities can be structured. The data has shown that both young men and women value the social status that qualifications provide, symbolising their successful character. They also both value the way engaging in formal education extends their ability to forge new relationships and build more social capital. However, there are several differences that could inform the way TVET opportunities are provided. Young women value education but do not always

use their qualifications for paid work, although that trend is shifting (Varshney, 2019). In contrast, young men value work more than qualifications and tend to look at qualifications as a means to maximising their employment or income potential. Although the young women represented a smaller percentage of the sample, the young women had more positive experiences of TVET, and in this sample the majority had pursued it after higher education. As we saw in Chapter Six, much of this had to do with the way young women viewed their role within the economy, as the primary caretakers and therefore would prioritise home and childcare over work. However, the non-linear nature of their transitions, from higher education into vocational education illuminated ways in which young women wanted to have labour market skills, and not only qualifications. This 'reverse transfer' (Moodie, 2008) from academic to vocational for young women highlights both the non-linear nature of educational transitions, as well as the limitations of the women's university qualifications.

Despite them not necessarily wanting to work, most of the young women pursued higher education because it was an expectation, but also wanted to ensure that their qualification gave them negotiating power and access to a job in the case that they lost the family's male primary breadwinner. TVTC is expanding TVET opportunities for young women, especially in areas that are considered more feminine such as beauty and culinary arts. Considering the positive view many young women have of TVET, this is a welcome development. However, providing training opportunities solves only one part of the TVET equation, as young women still face barriers to working outside the home. Enhancing the regulatory framework for small scale entrepreneurial or freelance work is one way to allow young women to pursue work and further utilise their skills. While this approach does re-enforce gendered expectations and opportunities, changes in the regulatory framework can nudge both women and their families in a direction where work opportunities become more commonplace.

Young men tended to have high aspirations for their future roles within their family as breadwinners. This was the foundation of their aspirations for work and education.

They framed these as functional endeavours that were necessary for achieving the social status that they desired and meeting expectations that would keep them connected to the social networks they belonged. In addition to increasing the way pathways are structured and reducing path dependency, policies to include early, thorough and good quality guidance would be especially beneficial to young men. Having access to more opportunities would reduce the need to draw on *wastas* and reduce the overall risks of navigating through the transition pathways while still allowing them to fulfil their expected roles.

7.5 Conclusion

The voices of young people collected through interviews for this research revealed sentiments toward education and careers at different stages in their lives which tended to place TVET outside the majority of young Saudis' 'horizons for action', rendering the choice to enter initial TVET as un-pragmatic. Pragmatic decisions were the ones that allowed young people to pursue opportunities that fit within their view of available and acceptable jobs—a view that was formulated through the development of habitus: family background, upbringing, social position and objective encounters in the labour market and socially established norms. Yet while these decisions were situated within these identities and objective structures, they were not fully determined by them. Each individual had a unique experience, revealing the varying influences of individual circumstances and access to social and cultural capital on decision-making. However, despite having the capacity to influence the borders of the social structures, the decisions young people make tend to strengthen these borders rather than loosen them.

Additionally, the data highlighted aspects of the Saudi context that were different to the situation in which Careership was envisioned and discussed, leading to new questions about the value attributed to the ability to make choices independently. Young Saudis tended to view going against traditions as risky, and their choices explicitly perpetuated existing social institutions by colouring inside the lines. Although this looks

restrictive when viewed through the youth transition literature discussed in Chapter Three, the data has shown that given the current social and governing structures in Saudi Arabia, challenging social structures may create a deeper rift between privilege and inequality. Much of the youth transition literature advocates for increased policy development to allow for more choice and agency (Evans, 2007). However, in the Saudi context, advocating for such at the level of the individual may prove counterproductive.

Chapter 8. **Conclusions**

In a quest to better understand the education and employment statistics available about young people's choices in Saudi Arabia, this thesis sought to answer questions about how young Saudis' perceptions of career opportunities influence their aspirations and about ways in which structural institutions impact decisions. This qualitative study of young people's perceptions about education and work revealed many facets of the manner in which the participants navigated through post-secondary training and education choices.

To better understand the way young people negotiate different social factors in their transitions into TVET, focus groups and interviews were conducted with 152 participants between the ages of 15 and 26 in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Utilising the theoretical framework and theories of youth transitions that were introduced in Chapter Three, the data was analysed in a way that could help illuminate the voices of the young people and their lived-experiences to answer the research questions. Although the existing theoretical lens fell short in explaining the nuances of these experiences in the Saudi context, the young people's stories filled the gaps. The themes that emerged from the research helped tell a story about education aspirations and transitions that has been glossed over in most existing research.

Through the analysis of the voices and experiences of young Saudi men and women, it became apparent that they have high aspirations and believe that opportunities are available to them. However, social institutions such as cultural definitions of gender roles and the role of the family are deeply embedded in the Saudi context, and, for the most part, these end up superseding individual aspirations and institutional reforms. When young people begin to pursue their opportunities, they are often met with roadblocks and limitations, leading them to adjust their aspirations. The availability of 'choice' for young people stems from their habitus; their internalised notions of what is culturally appropriate, influenced by historical and social institutions, and their

actions fall within their culturally derived horizons for action. Young people draw on their social and cultural capital to re-produce their social positions. In colouring within the existing lines and social boundaries, they are not creating new realities, but perpetuating existing ones (See Chapter Seven for an in-depth discussion of the findings).

As a response to the growing youth population and the shrinking government sector job opportunities, national policy reforms have expanded technical and vocational training opportunities for young people. However, statistics show that public TVET institutes remain a relatively unpopular education route for Saudi youth (See Chapters One and Two). A closer examination of the reform approach highlights an economically driven policy that assumes a positive relationship between investing in education for employment and growing economic returns. However, as Saudi Arabia's education spending outnumbers most countries in the world (See Chapter Two), and the economy is not expanding or diversifying at target levels, there are few better examples of the fallacy of the human capital theory assumptions (See Chapter Three). The response to lower than expected levels of enrolment in TVET has been to design more difficult pathways into tertiary education and to leave young people who wish to continue post-secondary education with fewer choices, almost forcing some students into TVET. Rather than endear TVET to these young people, these policies have led to a contempt for training due to the symbolic failure associated with pursuing anything less than academic tertiary education (See Chapters Five and Six). This final chapter presents some final remarks and conclusions. It is divided into four main sections. It will begin with a discussion of the contributions of the research. It will then go on to discuss the implications for current theory, the limitations of current policy, and conclude with future areas for research before sharing final thoughts.

8.1 Contribution of the research

This thesis offers several empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions. The constructivist lens and qualitative methodology, unconventional for this context, has

generated a vast amount of unique empirical evidence. This contribution is important because it gives voice to the young people involved in the study. The voices of young people are absent from policy documents and tend to be used anecdotally if at all. In collecting these stories and honouring them by carefully analysing them in a rigorous academic manner, I have illustrated the utility of rich qualitative data in uncovering reasons for policy failures and unintended consequences. The reliance on foreign consultants can result in cultural 'blind spots' in policy planning (See Sections 2.1 and 8.4). A deeper cultural understanding minimises the risk of blaming the culture for not conforming to the policy, and instead can lead to policies that are culturally relevant and sensitive.

Methodologically, this thesis has presented a new data collection method. To my knowledge, WhatsApp had not previously been used as an interview method in social science research. The available literature presents WhatsApp as a useful tool for collaboration and scheduling (See Sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.8). There is also literature related to the linguistic features of WhatsApp and its implications for language development and discourse analysis (See Sections 4.3.8). However, in using WhatsApp I have contributed to the literature available on research methods for social science research. I believe that this method is particularly suitable for use with young people who have access to technology. It was also a tool that provided a practical and accessible solution to the cultural and religious sensitivities within Saudi Arabia and could therefore be used widely in a context where face to face interactions are challenging or sensitive. For this project, using WhatsApp allowed me to get closer to my research participants without causing discomfort or challenging the young people's notions of what is appropriate.

Finally, this thesis has contributed to the youth transition theoretical literature in more than one way. First, by applying a theoretical lens about youth transitions that was generated in the industrialised world to a very different context, I was able to shed light on alternative understandings of choice. The role of social institutions in the Saudi

context highlighted the way that choice was not an individual activity. However, the young people in this research illustrated that just because choice was not individualised, it was not necessarily absent. The desire to preserve traditional social structures illustrated that these social structures were not always viewed negatively by my participants. By 'colouring within the lines', the young people in this study illustrated that they were able to make choices and take ownership over these choices even if they were not in control of the external influences and constraints on choice.

Additionally, this research has opened a very important conversation about the influence of *wastas* on the effectiveness of policy making in the Saudi context. While *wastas* have been studied in other contexts, it is important not to overlook the intricacies of how *wastas* are different from other social connections in different contexts, but also how they are similar. The use of *Wastas* in educational opportunities has not been studied, but this research has shown how influential they are to both perception of and availability of choice. *Wastas* are similar to social capital, but can be more accurately viewed as a social lubricant. Social capital is conceptualised as a positive force, and strengthens with increased accumulation of it, often leading to social mobility. However, *wastas* are maintained through being part of a social network. Some participants argued against using a *wasta* to move beyond their social status, even if their parents had access to *wastas* that could enable that. On more than one occasion, however, the young people expressed a desire to utilise their *wasta*, such as the students who aspired to work in the military because that is where all their relatives worked. Because *wastas* can be used as a form of social capital, but one that does not necessarily enhance one's social status from a mobility standpoint, this thesis has offered another way of conceptualising the utility of different kind of capital, and the way these kinds of capital either enhance, reproduce or depress opportunity.

8.2 Implications for current theory

In contrast with the literature that emphasises the decreasing importance of social institutions on individual choice and future opportunities, the context of Saudi Arabia presents a case where social institutions continue to play a monumental role in decision-making. Despite economic shifts toward a 'knowledge economy' and a neo-liberal approach to labour markets, young people's choices are driven by internalised traditions and norms that are often conflicting, in a similar way to the contradictions that resulted from the rapidly developing state (See Chapter Two). My contribution to the literature on youth education and career transitions has been to show how and when structural change is resistant to modernisation, globalisation and economic competitiveness. The Saudi context challenges the notion that education and career decisions are overtly economically driven and shows how in contexts where social participation is regulated or restricted, the family and cultural institutions are places where individuals have more input into the way they are run, and therefore remain heavily influential. My participants displayed resistance to the opportunity to push the boundaries of structure and assert more individual agentic behaviour. Instead of pushing back, many of the participants would draw on their social capital in order to *maintain* their social positions. Furthermore, those who did not have the sufficient social capital to do this would express a desire to access other kinds of capital to avoid choices that challenged traditional markers of social status despite the possible opportunities that lay in new pathways.

The concept of habitus was particularly useful in explaining the actions of my participants, even if the actions were different than many of the examples presented in the literature (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). Although Bourdieu's habitus has been criticised as being deterministic, leaving little room for agency and the influence of the individual, I argue that the theory has helped uncover why agency was not being asserted, rather than focus on whether or not there was an opportunity to be deliberate in making choices and pushing for change. Bourdieu's notion of habitus explains how young people's seemingly irrational and harmful choices are a result of the internalised

influences of family, social networks and gender in Saudi Arabia. While this may seem harmful through a Western lens, it is not perceived as such by the actors themselves. A reflexive interaction between identity and environment made this explanation possible. Individuals are influenced by their social surroundings, and their actions within their social settings re-legitimise the way society is structured. Hodgkinson's horizons for action were incredibly helpful in explaining the way young Saudis' habitus influenced their interactions within the education and career fields at different times.

However, considering the disadvantages and inequalities that young people experienced, it is also important to seek lenses that enable individuals to act within social and cultural norms to allow them to evolve in more equitable ways. Careership falls short in explaining the way large scale changes to social institutions could affect the way people's horizons are altered. New laws are fundamentally changing the opportunity structures for young people in Saudi Arabia, and therefore, the horizons for action will most likely shift. The questions that arise are many, and the contradictions will remain and deepen. The influence of new modes of social organisation and employment and education opportunities may change the availability of choice. However, considering the deeply embedded social structures, the resistance to these changes may be limited, and choices may continue to be guided by the underlying cultural and social norms and traditions that have proven resilient to such shifts in the past.

8.3 Limitations of the research

The shifting context and very dynamic nature of Saudi Arabia during the time of the research proved challenging, as young people's opportunities were changing and the education and labour market policies were constantly in flux. In four years, there have been four different Ministers of Education. Furthermore, while the sample in my study was diverse, with participants from both genders aged 15-26, I believe the composition of the sample had limits in providing a full picture of a transition experience. Including students that were in university to contrast their experience with those in vocational

colleges would have also provided a different perspective, and may have provided more examples of young people who exerted agency.

The time constraints of a thesis made it difficult to follow the young people longitudinally. However, I believe two rounds of data collection with the same group of students during their final year of secondary and then one year later after they had made a decision about their post-secondary destination would have given deeper insights into the transition experience. This would have enabled the young people to comment on the unexpected encounters along the way, and the way their experiences changed their opinions. It could have helped illuminate specific factors that contribute to changing aspirations or adjusting expectations. A longer data collection period could have allowed for cultivating a stronger bond with the participants which could have potentially led to more candid disclosures.

The limited and conflicting statistical data on the profile of students and education institutions in Saudi Arabia resulted in time consuming secondary data analysis that was only slightly more accurate than centrally reported government data. Being able to paint a clearer picture of the socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants and the diversity within the schools could have illuminated different influential factors and allowed for more intersectional analysis. Furthermore, the limited number of social studies on education and TVET, and the particularly scarce number of qualitative studies resulted in a broader focus on young people's experiences as a whole. While this study had the potential to examine the experiences of young people through a gender, religious or minority lens, the lack of available research narrowed the scope of the thesis.

Although the methodological approach was designed to collect both group and individual sentiments, the voices of other people involved in decision-making could have further enhanced our understanding of the decision-making process. My focus was on the young people's experiences, which is why their voices were the main focus of the research. However, including the voices of influential players in the young people's lives could have enabled a deeper discussion of the young people's perceptions and

experiences. Evidence from parents, could have been used to further illustrate the influence they have on young people's decisions.

Finally, due to the nature of interviews and focus groups, the data was self-reported and therefore potentially included elements of exaggeration and selective memory. However, the amount of data collected allowed for recurring themes to emerge which were illustrative of common narrative threads despite the possibility of inaccuracies in reporting. Additional time with the students, involving a broader sample and utilising additional quantitative tools could have enhanced the findings further.

8.4 Limitations of current policy

Since commencing this research, several public and private initiatives have launched in accordance with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 in order to achieve the objectives of building stronger links between education and the labour market. The TVTC launched several institutes in partnership with the private sector and the oil sector to train young Saudis in sectors that have been lacking in the past, establishing polytechnics and higher industrial training institutes that focus on building local knowledge and expertise in collaboration with international experts. Examples include the National Training Center for Facilities and Hospitality Management, a training centre established through an agreement between TVTC, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage and Aramco (FHM, 2019), and Higher Institute for Plastics Fabrication, established in an agreement with the TVTC, Saudi Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, SABIC and a Saudi partner with a Japanese company (Higher Institute for Plastics Fabrication, 2019). The TVET field in Saudi Arabia is fast changing, and the reforms continue to focus on human capital and efficient transitions for economic growth. However, as the participants of this research have indicated, as long as TVET provides limited future opportunities, young people will continue to replicate its negative status by avoiding it as far as possible.

Despite the potential unintended consequences of borrowing policy developed in different contexts, the use of management consultants has been a prevalent trend

throughout the development stages of the modern Saudi state (See Section 2.1). Although recent literature on policy borrowing in education has highlighted the pitfalls of analysing education out of context, countries continue to import education models across contexts (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). The consultant-run reforms in Saudi Arabia continue to benchmark Saudi progress against international 'best practices', a phrase used in the country's Vision 2030 as well as in the vision of the MOE and the TVTC (CEDA, 2016; MOE, 2019; TVTC, 2018). Steiner-Khamsi (2016) highlights the way that international benchmarking appeals to politicians who are in a hurry to compete globally, but likens terms such as "best practices" to "empty vessels that are, whenever needed, filled with local meaning" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016, p. 384). However, what has become known as the "global education industry" (Ball, 2012) continues to influence a standardisation and benchmarking approach to education development, utilising internationally developed tools to measure and compare education cross-nationally (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Mohamed and Morris (2019) argue that the reliance of the states in the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia on policy borrowing has surpassed that of any other region. The policy borrowing is also paired with a large network of advisors that are assuming an education development and policymaking role that has been traditionally played by the state. They further argue that when the imported policies fail, the local players are often blamed for these failures. Therefore, instead of looking for locally informed solutions, culture is seen as a barrier rather than an input to reform policy. This explains how the HCT approach continues to inform TVET strategy despite the missed targets and goals of TVET.

The result of the HCT approach has been rigid transition pathways out of secondary education to produce a set of skills that has been identified as an ideal one for economic development and growth. However, the participants shared stories of finding ways to circumvent the barriers they encountered and engaged in education and career paths that fit their own cultural definitions of development and growth, as well as that of their families. The economic approach stems from the adoption of internationally

informed policies and goals. Jones (2019) argues that while authoritarian governments utilise management consultants to gain legitimacy and implement more effective policies, the outcome of expert influence is not always positive. Several reforms at the education and labour ministries in Saudi Arabia illustrate the way that borrowing expertise not only fails to meet targets but results in unintended consequences that can lead to an overhaul of the entire reform effort.

The Career Education and Development (CED) initiative, re-branded today as *Subol* (meaning *paths* in English) (Subol, 2017) that I was involved in in 2014 (See Section 1.1) was launched under the era of the former Minister of Labour and retired businessman Adil Fakeeh, a firm believer in the importance of expertise from abroad and the positive influence of management consultants. However, career guidance cannot easily be transplanted across cultures as most theoretical approaches are underpinned by Western individualist ideologies (Hooley, 2017). CED was introduced alongside the Colleges of Excellence (CoE) initiative (See Section 2.9), amongst others, as part of a Kingdom-wide effort to facilitate the transition between education and work. However, neither of the initiatives reached their potential. The last update on *Subol's* website was in 2017 and the management of the CoEs, established to take over TVTC has now been incorporated into the TVTC's management. The experiment with these guidance programs revealed many of the shortcomings of the initial plan that did not take the local context sufficiently into consideration. Transplanted ideas of career guidance and undesirable specialisations led to an overhaul of the programs and a regression to earlier versions of them. Both examples (CED and CoE) were the result of decisions that were made by top level of decision-makers with the help of several management consultancies, and thus illustrate Jones' (2019) idea that borrowing expertise is often a result of an arrogant approach by decision-makers who are out of touch, and the borrowing tends to weaken the legitimacy of policymakers at the top levels of decision-making rather than strengthen it.

The importance of highlighting different contexts cannot be stressed enough. Importing policies from contexts with different political systems and social institutions without tailoring them to the local intricacies has failed time and time again. Ismail (2014) highlights the problem of superimposing education strategies to achieve a 'knowledge-based economy' through the notion of 'pragmatic failure'. His discussion raises questions about the cross transplantation of education ideals and the potential clash with existing Islamic ideals, leading in the end to a contradiction of inner beliefs and a form of cognitive dissonance (Ismail, 2014, p. 49). He concludes that, "as countries within the GCC seek to create knowledge societies it is important that the reforms in education are in conformity with the philosophical and theological beliefs of the peoples within those countries" (56). Learning from other contexts is important, if not desirable, but acknowledging political and cultural differences is paramount if the governments want policies to succeed. This research has shown that implementing strategies conceptualised in other contexts without a thorough understanding of the local factors at play has led to failures and additional challenges.

Education reform in Saudi Arabia to date has focused mainly on revising curriculum content and teacher training. Very little is known about education policy-making, and efforts to align economic development goals with education goals are thus unproductive at best. For TVET, a focus on physical expansion, and program variability is important, but little is known about aspirations and access. Investing in new buildings, more colleges, and new specializations will not reap the intended benefits if students do not want to attend these colleges or do not intend to work in a technical or vocational field. This study has shown that many young men view TVET as a last resort, and many turn to their 'wastas' to find jobs elsewhere. It also showed that many young women attend the government sponsored free university and training programs and do not intend to work. Although the statistics of employment within TVET industries are not clearly reported, this data suggests that TVET is used by those who cannot access academic education as a proxy to 'please' one's parents, but the certification is not

valued for the skills it signifies. The data has suggested that enrolling in TVET has the opposite effect, signalling poor work ethic and low employability. The value of the TVET certification must therefore be enhanced through a stronger tie between TVET institutes and industry. Outside of specialised polytechnics and semi-governmental TVET institutes such as the Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic, students complain of obsolete curricula and difficulties finding meaningful work after they obtain their qualifications. Research on successful attempts to link training to industry would be very helpful. This research would help identify strengths in partnerships, and the kinds of certifications that are considered valuable.

The data also suggests that those who see TVET as a second chance and have a strong desire to pursue a career in an industry related to TVET already have pre-existing labour market experience. However, state sponsored TVET is only available for five years from graduating from secondary school. My data has shown that the most serious interest in a career in TVET is after this phase, and students then end up paying for TVET instruction, yet those who received bursaries at a younger age tend not to work in the industry where they received their qualifications, but instead to move away from their TVET-training field to work in other industries. Widening the age of participation opportunities could allow for a more realistic alignment of aspirations and opportunities. Exploring the applicability of hybrid qualifications and different transition pathways, would be very helpful in imagining less restrictive choices.

Secondary schools are comprehensive in nature, and despite the availability of different tracks (science, literature, commercial), the schools place few restrictions on choosing among these tracks. Only 2% of Saudi secondary students are enrolled in a Secondary Industrial Institute, and the majority of TVET is pursued at the tertiary level. The open and comprehensive nature of secondary school does not prepare young people for the rigid and segmented labour market and students are often shocked by the limited availability of opportunities in academic universities and training colleges. The data suggests that a lack of careers guidance has significantly impacted the mismatch

between their optimistic aspirations and the difficult labour market. Careers guidance that focuses on psychometric abilities further compartmentalises opportunities, rather than allowing for more open navigation of a tertiary pathway. Additional research on how to provide large scale, good quality guidance that is locally informed is necessary.

Finally, the filtration system of centralised tests at the end of secondary to access secondary schools cannot continue to act as the final 'judge and jury' of university admissions. As mentioned, the unequal access to resources throughout secondary school significantly impacts the scores on these tests, and students are often unaware of their academic standing. Additional routes back into tertiary education could be immensely beneficial, loosening the rigidity of the tertiary system rather than creating more rigid boundaries. The data suggests that the stigma attached to failure leads young people to make myopic decisions that often leave them with fewer opportunities. Instead, reducing the 'finality' of failure by increasing opportunities could significantly help young people make better choices about their employment opportunities.

8.5 Future areas for research

Although the focus of this research was on choices and transitions into TVET, the underlying social structure and environment within which choices are made led to many additional questions about how the Saudi context factors into the decision-making process. Several areas for future study were identified throughout the research process.

The main finding of this research is that young people are not pushing for change on a large scale but are part of the process of maintaining the status quo. The first question that comes to mind is about agents of change. Who are the agents of change in Saudi Arabia, and how can you become an agent for change? Research on those who are making a difference, a cohort absent from my sample, but not absent in the Saudi context would illuminate the resources that are necessary to recognise limitations on action as well as mechanisms to overcome these limitations. How do aspirations change in contexts with top-down approaches to implementing policy? Do these

changes inspire higher aspirations for change, despite limitations on freedoms to act outside of certain frameworks?

In looking at agency and change, however, I believe it is also necessary to explore the influence of culture on maintaining the status quo and on changing it. Exploring cultural influences would need to be conducted without doing harm to the value systems that constitute the social fabric in the society. Research on the influence of Saudi culture would also need to take a closer look at the diversity amongst the Saudi society. Chapter Two outlined the way historical events led to the current social makeup of the country, but many of these characteristics are invisible. Shedding light on the different cultural norms can help conduct more intersectional research and illuminate patterns of privilege and disadvantage so that these can be addressed on the micro-level.

Additionally, a deeper understanding of gender within the Saudi context is very important. When I began this research, I did not intend to focus on questions of gender because of the way gender is researched in the country. Few academic studies about women's roles in Saudi Arabia are available. Instead, the existing body of research tends to be journalistic in nature and very polarised (See Human Rights Watch, 2019 as an example of this). The research has traditionally focused on restrictive policies through a predominantly Western lens, or on women and men's roles in the context of Islamic societies. These studies are not taken seriously inside Saudi Arabia because they do not acknowledge cultural differences. Therefore, the other body of (mainly journalistic) literature tends to be defensive in nature.

Researching gender in Saudi Arabia through lenses from the global South is pertinent to a better understanding of the position of women and men (Agarwal, Humphries and Robeyns, 2005). The research needs to be contextualised and culturally informed by the diverse stories and experiences within Saudi Arabia. Highlighting narratives from within the country will shed light on the way that gender is restricting, but also show how current understandings of gender fall short of painting a full picture (See

Thompson, 2019). More recent media from Saudi Arabia portrays women as central figures in the process of change that is occurring (The National, 2019). Without a clear understanding of the historical context and the shifting patterns, many unresolved questions will persist, as will patterns of privilege and inequality.

In addition to gender, research on family dynamics and gender roles in the family need much more in-depth research. Saudi society has traditionally been very private and very little research focuses on families and family relationships beyond stating that they are important. Throughout this research, family has played a central role in young people's decision-making. Additional research on the intersectionality with gender, ethnicity, financial status, and backgrounds would provide more insight into the role of this social organisational unit. Thompson (2019) briefly touches on the strength of family ties in Saudi society but studying the role of the family through multiple sociological lenses would help illuminate the nature of choices and relationships and their influence on access, security, freedom, and social justice.

Finally, additional research on TVET is necessary. A deeper understanding of the historical meanings attached to different industries and a social topography of these meanings could further illuminate sentiments about different types of work. Definitions of different kinds of education and their value must be explored in greater depth. This research has shown that there is a limited understanding of TVET and its purpose within the education system. The narratives of young people have helped define how TVET is perceived and viewed, but additional work on how these definitions relate to different industries, as well as how they may evolve with new policies and practices would be useful both for education research overall, as well as for policy planning.

This research has illustrated the limited academic studies on the sociology of Saudi Arabia. Any research about Saudis can help deepen our understanding of the complexities within the Saudi society, moving beyond an essentialised version of a Saudi citizen. Additional studies can help build a body of literature on which future researchers can draw and with which they can engage critically. These studies can also help inform

broader understandings of how people respond to rapidly moving social and political transformations.

8.6 Final thoughts

This thesis has suggested that despite a policy directive from the Saudi government to utilise TVET to enhance skill levels, the current structure of TVET does not satisfy the aspirations of young people or that of employers. TVET certifications still do not carry enough currency in the labour market, thus perpetuating their status as inferior to academic qualifications. Although many young Saudis may prefer the nature of TVET education to the nature and pace of academic education, the current educational infrastructure perpetuates a stigmatised view of TVET within society. Furthermore, the proliferation of new brands of TVET institutes continues to de-value the certifications of Colleges of Technology (COTs). As young people aspire to fulfil traditional social roles, TVET can only be successful in the Saudi context if it caters to markers of social definitions of status and success. In absence of this alignment, students will continue to view a decision to pursue TVET as an unpragmatic choice, not because of the inherent character of technical and vocational jobs, but because of the social meanings attributed to TVET and the limited opportunities associated with related employment.

A strategy that re-imagines both the role of TVET and its structure, and one that acknowledges the sentiments and aspirations of young people is necessary for the successful expansion of TVET. While taking both the social and economic dimensions of TVET into account, such a strategy could begin to re-define the meaning of TVET for its target audience, i.e. potential students, their families and society as a whole. Many of the participants believed that their initial post-secondary choices would be permanent destinations for them. Students and employers alike held the belief that the entry point into post-secondary education or work served as a label: either motivated and successful or unmotivated failures (Baqadir, Patrick and Burns, 2011; Hertog, 2012).

There was an ongoing struggle to find an appropriate interpretive throughout this research. Finding a lens that I did not feel was patronizing to Saudis proved a challenge, since most theory available to me was generated in a Western context. I did not want to wedge the stories of participants into an explanation that did not fit. It would not do justice to hold the participants and the society accountable to unachievable and inappropriate measures. At the same time, I wanted to remain objective enough to identify areas where inequality and privilege were unjust and restrictive. Decision-making is an embedded social practice that evolves with changing economic and social opportunities, guided by symbolic meanings of tradition and culture. The embedded social practices, while often invisible, are not always rejected by the participants themselves. There was an appreciation for the current social structure, and the reciprocal support system and ensuing social safety net.

The limitations on free choice meant that social capital could be used to find creative solutions and pathways to more desirable choices. However, the creative solutions were not available to all, and the lived experiences of my participants show that the structures were often limiting and restrictive, both in institutional reach as well as through cultural practices. It would not do to force young people down pathways that may seem more equitable from the outside, but it is equally patronising to assume that many of the limitations are not harmful.

Change for the better across all factions of society will remain challenging if these challenges are not discussed more openly and candidly. Young people will continue to reproduce the restrictive social and institutional structures they have experienced if they do not engage in a conversation about the constraints. Giddens (1991b) stresses that one of the essential features of a modern society is reflexivity, i.e. subjecting social activity to 'chronic revision' in light of new information (Giddens, 1991b, p. 21). In order to gauge the level of consciousness and reflexivity Saudis are engaging in, one must not ignore the massive changes to social and economic governing structures in Saudi Arabia since 2016. With change, the level of awareness and questioning inevitably increases,

shifting beyond the traditional, toward a more equitable social space, where both individual and collective aspirations can be appreciated and eventually realised.

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Appendix 1 Map of Saudi Arabia

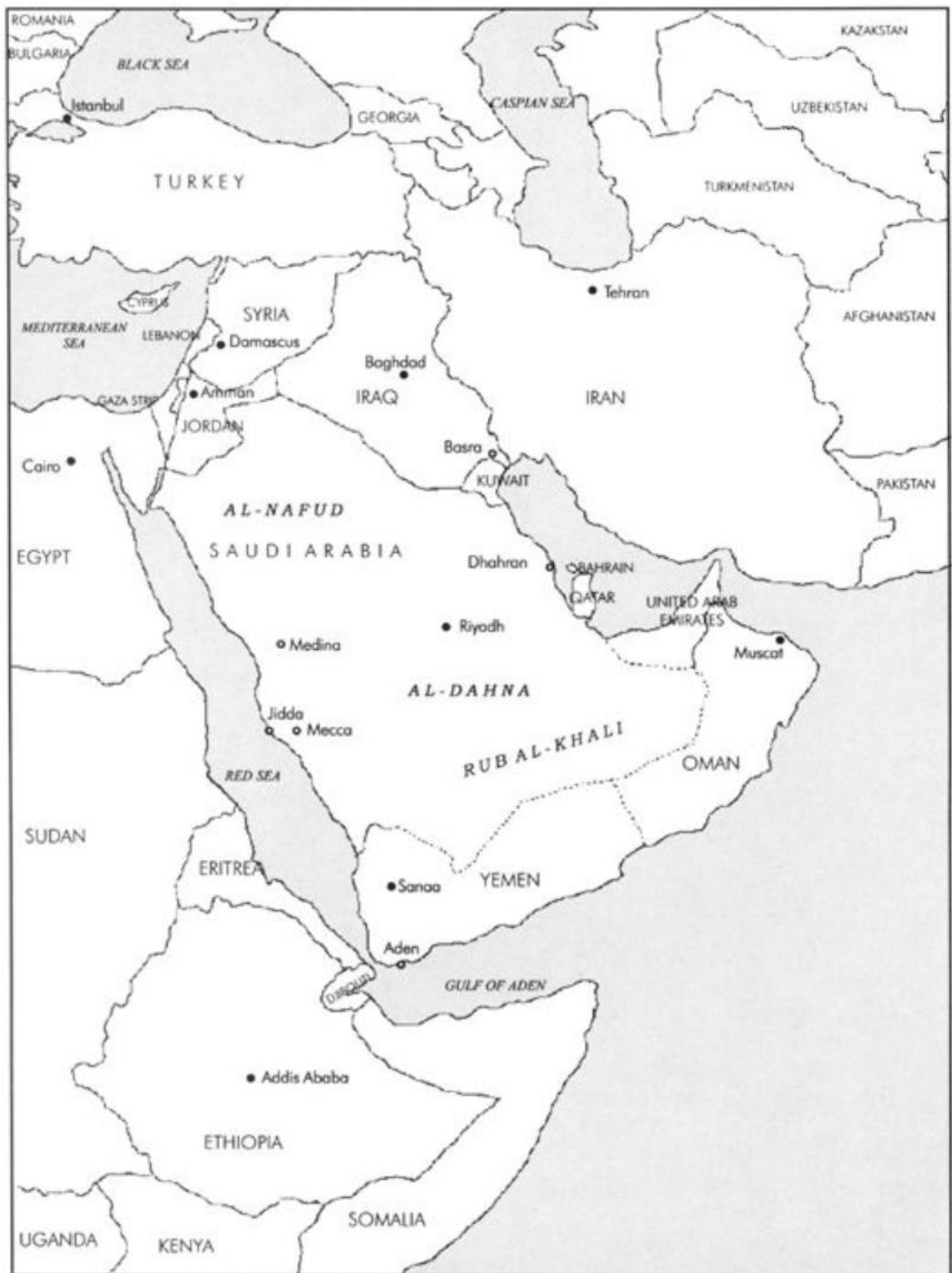


Figure 8-1 map of Saudi Arabia

from Vassiliev, A. (2013). *History of Saudi Arabia (Kindle Edition)*. London: Saqi Books

Appendix 2 Numbers and distribution of colleges

ثانياً: خلاصات تفصيلية للمنشآت التدريبية والبرامج التدريبية للعام المالي ١٤٣٩/١٤٤٠هـ (2018 م) :

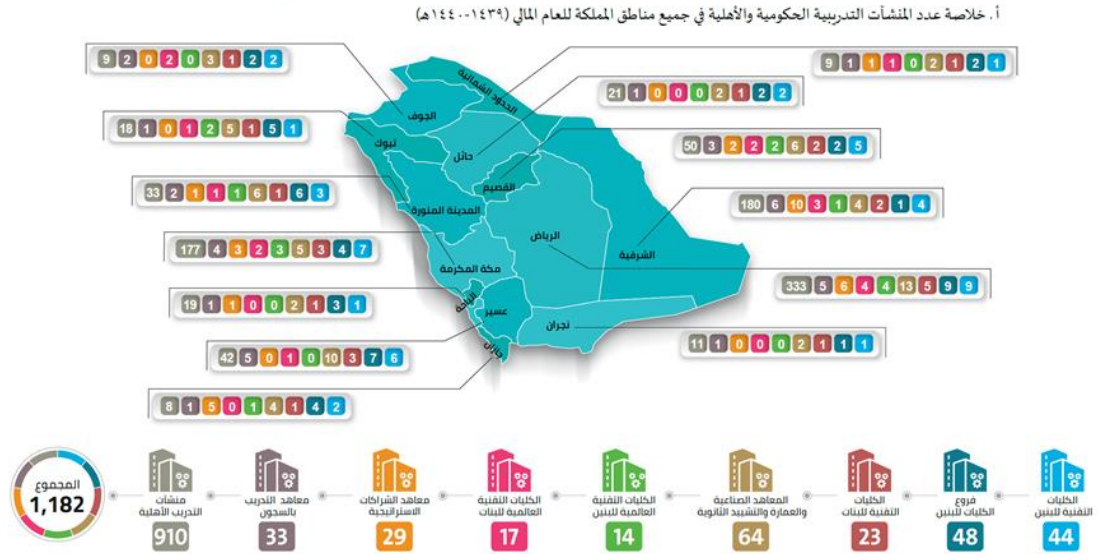


Figure 8-2 Geographic distribution of all TVTC institutes in 2018 from Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC). (2018). Annual report. Riyadh: Technical and vocational training corporation.

Blue	Boys ToCs
Teal	Satellite campuses of boys ToCs
Rust	Girls ToCs
Beige	Secondary industrial institutes
Green	Boys COEs
Pink	Girls COEs
Orange	Strategic partnership institutes
Taupe	Training institutes in prisons
Grey	Private training insitutes

Appendix 3 Distribution of employed Saudis by main economic activity

Main Area of economic activity	2016	2019
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	5.06%	0.50%
Mining and quarrying	2.69%	3.56%
Manufacturing	3.83%	6.47%
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1.09%	1.37%
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0.52%	0.14%
Construction	2.58%	9.72%
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	5.31%	14.13%
Transportation and storage	3.21%	2.43%
Accommodation and communication	0.70%	2.38%
Information and communication	1.01%	1.10%
Financial and insurance activities	1.77%	2.07%
Real estate activities	1.38%	0.32%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	0.77%	1.11%
Administrative and support service activities	2.13%	3.63%
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security	36.20%	38.07%
Education	23.50%	5.94%
Human health and social work activities	6.89%	5.13%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	0.09%	0.20%
Other service activities	1.14%	1.65%
Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods and services producing activities of households for own use	NA	NA
Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies	NA	NA

Sources:

General Authority for Statistics Saudi Arabia (GaStat). (2019). Labour market first quarter 2019. Riyadh: General Authority for Statistics
<https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/814> (Last accessed 25/09/2019).

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 (Last accessed 25/09/2019).

Institute of Education



Hanaa Almoaibed
Education, Practice & Society
UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London
WC1H 0AL

Wednesday 24th August

Dear Hanaa,

Full ethical approval for REC 827 Technical and vocational education and training in Saudi Arabia: young people's experiences of career decision-making

Thank you for your application to the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee for ethics approval of the above named project. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

As part of the continued process of monitoring ethics at the Institute, the committee would be interested to hear if you encounter any ethical challenges throughout the course of your project. This will help us to develop our policies and training in line with the needs of researchers. If certain issues are raised during your research, a short summary of how these challenges were addressed can be submitted upon completion of the project.

Please note that a decision by the UCL Institute of Education's Research Ethics Committee to approve a research project does not imply an expert assessment of all possible ethical issues nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which researchers must themselves have for all research which they carry out, including its effects on all those involved.

The UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee's consideration of all ethics applications are dependent upon the information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate. It is your responsibility to notify the Research Ethics Committee if any of the following occur:

- A complaint of any kind from any person involved or affected by your research. These may include parents/carers, gatekeepers, junior researchers and also members of the group being researched who may be adversely affected by the research reports.
- Changes in the research design, instruments, setting or participants.
- Any other events during the course of the research which give rise to ethical concerns.

I would like to wish you every success with the project. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Best wishes,

Hannah

Hannah Pope
Research Ethics and Governance Administrator
UCL Institute of Education

Appendix 5 **Sample approach letter for institutions**

This was modified for different institutions to reflect the targeted cohort and gatekeepers in charge.

In the name of god the most merciful, the most beneficial

Dear xx

In line with the Kingdom's "Vision 2030" plan, and in an effort to actively contribute to decreasing the Saudi Arabia's unemployment level, I am pursuing a PhD focusing on technical and vocational education titled "post-secondary career decision-making: young people in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Saudi Arabia" from University College London's Institute of Education in the United Kingdom, rated number one for Education worldwide.

This research builds on my previous work in corporate social responsibility in Saudi Arabia, wherein I worked on youth empowerment programs that offered students career planning tools, and which was conducted in partnership with the Human Resources Development Fund under the Career Education and Development Fast Track in 2014. Throughout that work it became apparent that young Saudis are in need of support and guidance to learn about their career opportunities and appropriate industries, in line with that desired futures, their abilities and the reality that they live in, and the importance of breaking stereotypes that impede diversifying work opportunities.

The purpose of my PhD research is to learn about the process of decision making and to what extend certain social, economic and family background factors influence their individual decisions and actions in order to seek TVET policies that are designed for Saudi students, stemming from their life experiences and their real

opportunities, ensuring that they are aligned with the realities that they live within the Kingdom.

The research methodology will be qualitative in nature and focus on the experiences of the youth from their point of view, in their voices, and seeking their descriptions, as qualitative research allows researchers to thematically analyse and understand rich data about personal experiences rather than through statistics alone.

Based on this plan I am writing to seek your assistance in facilitating my data collection process by allowing me to conduct focus groups in a variety of training facilities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia according to the criteria below, and delegating the responsibility of arranging this to the most appropriate body within the facilities:

1. The facilities will be in the Eastern Province (male and female training facilities)
2. We will need between 6-8 students in each institute who are in their second year of study
3. They enrolled in the institute directly out of secondary school (between 17-22 years old)
4. Each focus groups will not take longer than 90 minutes
5. Students will be selected randomly and be from a variety of achievement backgrounds (high, medium and low)
6. The group will come from a mix of different departments.

May I also stress the following:

1. Students must consent to participating in writing (I will provide forms)
2. Confidentiality will be upheld throughout and both students and participating institutes will remain anonymous in my reporting
3. The focus groups should not interfere with the students' schedules

I thank you for your understanding and support.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الى XX

انطلاقاً من "رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية 2030" ومن أجل المساهمة الفعالة في تخفيض معدل البطالة في المملكة لقد انصب موضوع بحثي لرسالة الدكتوراه على قضية التعليم التقني والمهني حيث أن عنوان البحث هو: "العوامل الاجتماعية المؤثرة على اتخاذ القرارات المهنية ما بعد المرحلة الدراسية الثانوية: وضع التعليم التقني والمهني في المملكة"

العربية السعودية" وذلك من University College London's Institute of Education في المملكة المتحدة وهي تعتبر في المرتبة الأولى في مجال التعليم دولياً.

وهذا البحث يعتبر امتداداً لعملية السابق في مجال المسؤولية الاجتماعية في المملكة والذي تبني هدف تمكين الشباب لاكتشاف قدراتهم وفرصهم الوظيفية والذي يرمي شراكة مع صندوق تنمية الموارد البشرية تحت برنامج المسار السريع للتثقيف والإرشاد المهني عام 2014 كما اتضح لي من خلال هذا العمل احتياج الطالب السعودي للدعم والتوجيه لمعرفة الفرص الوظيفية والمجالات الملائمة لرغباته وقدراته وواقعه وأهمية كسر بعض الثقافات المشهقة للتنوع الوظيفي.

والهدف من بحث الدكتوراه هو التعرف على عملية "اتخاذ القرار" لدى الشباب ومدى تأثير العوامل الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والعائلية على قراراتهم وأفعالهم الفردية، وذلك من أجل البحث في أفضل سياسة لتوفير التعليم التقني والمهني للطالب السعودي من واقع حياته وفرصه للتأكد من موائمتها مع الوضع الراهن في المملكة.

ومنهجية الدراسة سوف تكون نوعية 'qualitative' مركزة على طبيعة التجارب من وجهة نظر الطالب وبلغته ووصفه حيث أن طبيعة الدراسات النوعية تمكن الباحث من التحليل الموضوعي الدقيق مفسر التجارب والمتغيرات الشخصية بدلاً من الأرقام والنسب فحسب.

بناء على هذه الخطة أمل من سعادتكم التكرم بتسهيل مهمتي والموافقة على إجراء مقابلات جماعية (focus groups) من وحدات تدريبية مختلفة في المنطقة الشرقية وحسب المواصفات التالية وتوجيه من هو المسؤول في تيسيرها حسب الآتي:

1. أن تكون الكليات في المنطقة الشرقية (بنين وبنات)

بنين: الكلية التقنية بالدمام - الكلية التقنية بحفر الباطن - المعهد الصناعي الثانوي بالقطيف - المعهد التقني السعودي لخدمات البترول

بنات: الكلية التقنية للبنات بالأحساء - معهد الخليج للتدريب -

2. من ستة إلى ثمانية طالب/طالبة في سنتهم الثانية من برنامج دراستهم من كل كلية/معهد

3. تسجيلهم بالكلية كان بعد التخرج من المرحلة الثانوية مباشرة (بالنسبة للمعاهد يكون عمر الطالب

بين 17-22)

4. لا تستغرق مدة المقابلة مدتها أكثر من ساعة ونصف مع كل مجموعة

5. اختيارهم يكون بشكل عشوائي وبمستويات تعليمية مختلفة (2 ممتاز / 3 جيد جداً / 3 جيد / 2 مقبول)

6. تخصصاتهم تكون مختلفة (3 من نفس التخصص كحد أقصى)

علماً بأن من شروط المشاركة

1. رغبة الطالب بالمشاركة وموافقة الخطية

2. ضمان السرية التامة للكلية المشاركة وللطالب المشارك

3. عدم تعارض توقيت المقابلة مع جدول الطالب

شاكراً لكم مساندتكم وتفهمكم بأهمية هذه المرحلة من البحث راجين أن يوفقنا الله لما فيه الخير والسداد مع خالص التحية

Appendix 6 Ministry of education approval

الرقم : ٣٨١٠٠٩٩٧
التاريخ : ١٤٣٨ / ١ / ١٢ هـ
المرفقات : -



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
(٢٨٠)
الإدارة العامة للتعليم بالمنطقة الشرقية
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير
PD

القيم: المواطنة- الإلتقان- العدل- العمل بروح الفريق- التنمية الذاتية- المسؤولية الاجتماعية	الرسالة: تقديم خدمات تربوية وتعليمية ذات جودة عالية وفق معايير عالمية بمشاركة مجتمعية	الرؤية: الريادة لبناء جيل مبدع
--	---	--------------------------------

إلى: المكرمين / مديري مكاتب التعليم (الخبر - الظهران - القطيف) حفظهم الله
المكرمين مديري / ات مكاتب التعليم (شرق الدمام - غرب الدمام) حفظهم الله
من : مديرة إدارة التخطيط والتطوير
بشأن: تسهيل مهمة الباحثة / هناء المعبيد

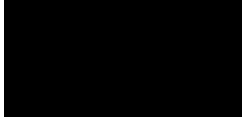
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ، ، ،

بناءً على موافقتنا بشأن تسهيل مهمة الباحثة هناء عبد الله المعبيد ، طالبة الدراسات العليا لمرحلة الدكتوراه بجامعة يونيفرستي كولج لندن ، والتي تجري بحثاً بعنوان (التدريب التقني و المهني في المملكة العربية السعودية: عملية اتخاذ القرارات المهنية لدى الشباب و الشبابات في المنطقة الشرقية) ، حيث يتطلب البحث تطبيق استبانة و مقابلة على عينة من طلاب و طالبات المرحلة الثانوية بالمدارس الحكومية و الأهلية .

عليه فلا مانع من تسهيل مهمتها ، علماً أن التطبيق سيكون من قبل فريق بحثي وفق اللوائح و الأنظمة خلال سنة من تاريخه .

يسعدني شكركم على عنايتكم وتجاوبكم مع ظروف الباحثة
والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ، ، ،

نعيمه سالم السعدي



م/الجبر

١٢ / ١ / ١٤٣٨ هـ

Office26@educast.gov.sa

٨٢٦٩٣٦١

فاكس ٨٢٦٤٩٧٧

Appendix 7 **Supervisor's letter to TVTC seeking data collection approval**

9 September, 2016

Dear Sir,

HANAA ABDULLA ALMOAIBED: Data collection for PhD research

I am writing to you regarding Hanaa Abdulla Almoaibed who is a PhD student at the UCL Institute of Education:

Name: Hanaa Abdulla Almoaibed

Type of Request: Self-Pay Student

Saudi National ID: 1016781070

Date of Request: 13-09-2016

Application Number: 10138433

I am writing to request your support for Ms Almoaibed with her PhD research by granting her permission to conduct interviews with students enrolled in Technical and Vocational Training Corporation training units. Ms Almoaibed is a second year student who has successfully completed her upgrade examination, which is a formal assessment in which her research question, goals and framework were reviewed. In addition to this, she has also received formal approval from the Research Ethics Committee at University College London's Institute of Education. In order to give its approval, the Research Ethics Committee has reviewed the research proposal, research questions and the ethical considerations relevant to her project.

Ms Almoaibed's study focuses on the role of technical and vocational education and training in achieving the country's new Vision 2030. Her study will examine the social factors that influence young people's career decision-making through an in-depth study of young people's responses to questions about barriers and facilitators to pursuing different post-secondary academic and technical educational opportunities. Her methods include conducting focus groups within training institutes. Through completing this study Ms. Almoaibed should be able to make recommendations on how to align the expectations and aspirations of young people in Saudi Arabia with the current and potential opportunities available to them.

Almoaibed 307

I thank you for supporting Ms Almoaibed in completing her study by allowing her to coordinate with the relevant Training Units within the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation to conduct focus groups with students who are currently enrolled.

Yours faithfully



Alison Fuller

Professor of Vocational Education and Work



Pro-Director (Research and Development)

UCL Institute of Education

London

WC1H 0AL

Appendix 8 TVTC Approval letter

<p>المؤسسة العامة للتدريب التقني والمهني</p> <p>رقم : ١٢٥٤٦٠٥١٧ التاريخ : ١٤٣٨/٠١/١٨ المرفقات :</p>  <p>www.tvtc.gov.sa</p>	<p>ation dies</p> 	<p>المملكة العربية السعودية المؤسسة العامة للتدريب التقني والمهني الإدارة العامة للبحوث والدراسات المهنية</p>
المشروعات:	التاريخ: / / ١٤ هـ	الرقم:
<p>الموضوع: الموافقة على تسهيل المهمة للياحة / هناء بنت عبدالله المعبيد بمخت بعنوان: " التدريب التقني والمهني في المنطقة الغربية السعودية : عملية إتخاذ القرارات المهنية لدى الشباب والشابات في المنطقة الشرقية "</p>		
حفظه الله	سعادة الاستاذة/ هناء بنت عبدالله المعبيد	
<p>السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.</p>		
<p>إشارة إلى طلبكم المتضمن الموافقة على تسهيل المهمة بعنوان "التدريب التقني والمهني في المملكة العربية السعودية : عملية إتخاذ القرارات المهنية لدى الشباب والشابات في المنطقة الشرقية " .</p>		
<p>عليه، نفيد سعادتكم بموافقتنا على إجراء مقابلات مع عدد من متدربي ومتدربات المؤسسة العامة للتدريب التقني والمهني بالكلية التقنية ومعاهد التدريب (بنين ، بنات) بالمنطقة الشرقية وذلك وفق الشروط والضوابط التالية:</p>		
<p>١. أن لا يترتب على ذلك أي متطلبات مالية أو معنوية من جراء تطبيق الدراسة. ٢. أن لا يخل تطبيق الدراسة بالعملية التدريبية بالوحدة التدريبية.</p>		
<p>نرجو تقبل بالغ شكرنا على دعمكم لمثل هذه المبادرة والتي نأمل بإذن الله أن تسهم نتائجها في دفع عجلة الدراسات والبحوث في مجال التدريب التقني والمهني وتطوير أداء المؤسسة.</p>		
<p>وتقبلوا سعادتكم أطيب التحيات ، ، ،</p>		
<p>المشرف العام على الإدارة العامة للبحوث والدراسات المهنية م. عادل بن عبدالله العود</p>		
	<p>ص.ب ٧٨٢٣ الرياض ١١٤٧٢ - طريق الملك فهد - سنترال الإدارة، ٢٨٩٦٥٢١ - فاكس - ٤٠٦٠٤٠٢ P.O. Box 7823 - Riyadh 11472 - Tel.2896521- Fax- 4060402</p>	

Appendix 9 Letter from Saudi cultural bureau

ROYAL EMBASSY OF SAUDI ARABIA
CULTURAL BUREAU
LONDON

المملكة العربية السعودية
الملاحية الثقافية
لندن

1438/01/12 هـ

رقم السجل المدني: 1016781070

الى من يهمه الأمر

تفيد الملاحية الثقافية بسفارة المملكة العربية السعودية في لندن بأن الطالبة / هناء عبدالله مهنا المعبيد تدرس على حسابها الخاص في جامعة UCL Institute of Education مرحلة الدكتوراه في تخصص التربية، اعتباراً من 1436/07/01 هـ الموافق 2015/04/20 م إلى 1441/01/16 هـ الموافق 2019/09/15 م.

وبناء على خطاب المشرف الدراسي على بحث الدكتوراه المؤرخ في 2016/9/9 م تأمل الطالبة أن تقوم برحلة علمية إلى المملكة العربية السعودية، لإكمال إجراءات بحثها:

" التدريب التقني والمهني في المملكة العربية السعودية: عملية اتخاذ القرارات المهنية لدى الشباب والشابات في المنطقة الشرقية " .

وقد تم منحها هذا الخطاب بناء على رغبته.

وتقبلوا خالص التحية والتقدير،،،

القائم بأعمال الملاحية الثقافية
بسفارة المملكة العربية السعودية في لندن

د. فهد بن عبدالله النعيم

الملاحية الثقافية
السفارة العربية السعودية في لندن
ROYAL EMBASSY OF SAUDI ARABIA
CULTURAL BUREAU
LONDON

الرقم: التاريخ: الموافق: المرفقات:

630 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5RY Tel: +44 (0) 20 3249 7000 Fax: +44 (0) 20 3249 7001 E-mail: sacbuk@uksacb.org
www.uksacb.org

Institute of Education



اتفاقية المحافظة على سرية البيانات لمساعد البحث

هذه الاتفاقية تخص دراسة "التدريب التقني والمهني في المملكة العربية السعودية: عملية اتخاذ القرارات المهنية لدى الشباب والشابات في المنطقة الشرقية" التي تجريها طالبة هناء عبدالله المعبيد (الباحث الرئيسي) في يونيفرستي كولاج لندن ولها عدة أهداف من بينها:

1. التعرف على مدى إدراك الطالب نحو الفرص المتاحة له بعد المرحلة الثانوية
2. التعرف على العوامل التي تؤثر على القرارات المهنية بعد المرحلة الثانوية
3. مدى تأثير البيئات الاجتماعية والأكاديمية والعائلية والثقافية والطبقية على اختيار المسار المهني

وسوف يتم تحليل البيانات الناتجة عن المقابلات الجماعية والفردية بشكل موضوعي وتناقش في ضوء نظريات علم الاجتماع في دراسات الشبابا ودراسات المراحل الانتقالية للشباب وعملية اتخاذ القرارات المتعلقة بالمسار المهني، وفي ضوء ذلك:

أتعهد أنا الموقع أُنذاه:

1. أن أحافظ على سرية جميع المعلومات ولا أشارك معلومات البحث بجميع أنواعها مع أي شخص سوى الباحث الرئيسي
2. أن أحزن البيانات الورقية والالكترونية بطريقة آمنة
3. عند انتهاء العمل ألتزم بأن أقدم وأسلم كافة المعلومات بأنواعها للباحث الرئيسي
4. بعد التنسيق مع الباحث الرئيسي ألتف جميع البيانات بأنواعها

اسم مساعد البحث:

التوقيع: _____ التاريخ: _____

اسم الباحث الرئيسي: هناء عبدالله المعبيد

التوقيع: _____ التاريخ: 31/10/2016

إذا كانت لديكم أسئلة أو اهتمامات أو شكاوى أو تعتقد أن البحث قد يضر بك يمكنك التواصل مع الباحث الرئيسي عن طريق الهاتف أو البريد الإلكتروني. أما إذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو اهتمامات أو شكاوى لم يتم الإجابة عليها يمكنك التواصل مع المسؤول في الجامعة.

للتواصل مع الباحث مباشرة	للتواصل مع مشرف البحث في الجامعة
هنا عبدالله المعبيد +966501999494 +447480184884 hanaa.almoaibed@ucl.ac.uk	Alison Fuller Pro-Director (Research and Development) Professor of Vocational Education and Work +44 207 6126376/6092 alison.fuller@ucl.ac.uk

UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL



Appendix 11 Focus Group introduction

Introductory Statement (King and Horrocks, 2010, pp. 74, 111)

Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion about the choices you have made that led you to this college.

As second year students, you will most likely have had experiences where you have had to question why you are here, and where you will go next. We think that it's important to understand more about your first-hand experiences, what kinds of choices you've made, and what stood in your way. We are interested in your career aspirations and plans. This information will help plan policies and programs that are truly relevant to students like you.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

During this group interview, remember that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we are about to ask. We expect that you will all have varying points of view, so please share your point of view even if it is different from others'—please feel free to follow up on something someone said, agree, disagree, or give an example. If you don't have something to share for each question don't feel pressured to.

We are interested in hearing from everyone so we may call on those who aren't sharing, or ask those who are eager to share to give others a chance. Please make sure that if you share today's discussion with others after the focus group, that you don't talk about who said what, as we are keeping your answers confidential and anonymous. We will use an audio recording device to ensure that the whole discussion is recorded, but again, this will be stored for the purpose of this research alone, unless otherwise indicated in the future.

We also assure you that the data will not be shared with anyone in the training institute before being anonymised and individual responses are made unidentifiable. Your participation will have nothing to do with your performance or treatment at this institute. We have shared an agreement with the college to ensure that this remains the case.

Finally, please help us keep to schedule by respecting all opinions and staying on track.

Based on what I have just said, I will now talk about the consent documents. I will read the statements out to you. While I do this, please think about them, and if you are in agreement, sign them, and return them to me now. You can keep a copy for yourself. Also, just include your first name on these! Remember that your names and identity will not be used in the research, and that everything that is said in this room is confidential.

أولا أشكركم على الموافقة على المشاركة في حلقة النقاش والتحدث عن قراراتكم التي أدت إلى الانضمام إلى هذه الوحدة التدريبية.

كطلاب في سنتهم الثانية من الدراسة يفترض أنكم مررتم بتجارب جعلتكم تتساءلون عن اختياركم ووجودكم بهذه الوحدة التدريبية وتتساءلون عن فرصكم المستقبلية

هذه الجلسة مهمة للغاية للاستماع الى طبيعة تجاربكم .. عن طبيعة الفرص المتوفرة لكم .. طبيعة الخيارات التي اتخذتموها وعن العقبات التي واجهتموها. طموحاتكم وخططكم مهمة بالنسبة لنا.. لأنكم انتم الفئة المستهدفة في السياسات المتعلقة بالبرامج التدريبية وصوتكم وآرائكم لابد أن تؤخذ بعين الاعتبار من أجل تصميم برامج ومناهج تخدم احتياجاتكم.

قبل أن نبدأ.. هل لديكم أي أسئلة عن أهداف البحث؟

خلال هذا النقاش الجماعي ليس هناك أجوبة صحيحة أو خاطئة للأسئلة المطروحة حيث أننا نريد أن نسمع منكم... كما نتوقع اختلاف التجارب والأفكار وأوجه النظر.. لذلك نرجو منكم المشاركة والتعقيب على أجوبة زملائكم ان تشابهت الآراء أو اختلفت.. أو إعطاء أمثلة من واقع تجاربكم لتوصيل المعلومة أو الفكرة بشكل أوضح وإذا لم تكن لديكم مشاركة فلا حرج من ذلك.. هذا واننا نبحث عن التجارب الفريدة من نوعها والمتشابهة. يمكننا نسأل أحدكم ان وجدنا مشاركاتكم قليلة كما يمكننا أن نطلب منكم إعطاء غيركم الفرصة للمشاركة ان كانت اجوبتكم أكثر من غيركم

من أجل راحتكم نطلب من الجميع عدم مشاركة الآخرين الأجوبة والنقاشات التي سوف نشاركها مع الآخرين خارج هذه القاعة.. ومن المهم للغاية انكم لم تنسبوا الآراء المطروحة لصاحبها وذلك لضمان أخذ الراحة في الجواب .. نحن نضمن لكم السرية التامة ونطلب منكم المعاملة بالمثل

سوف نسجل النقاش لكي نحفظ ونستفيد من جميع الأجوبة وسوف تستخدم لتدوين الآراء بطريقة تحفظ سرية المتحدث ثم نتلفها.. و لن نستخدمها لأي غرض خارج نطاق هذا البحث الا اذا طلبنا الموافقة على ذلك مستقبلا كما أننا نؤكد لكم أن هذه البيانات لن تشارك مع أي شخص في الوحدة التدريبية الا بعد تغييرها وجميع الهويات تبقى مجهولة، مشاركتك بهذه المقابلة لي تؤثر على أدائك الأكاديمي أو معاملتك ولدينا اتفاقية مع الادارة لضمان ذلك. وأخيرا نطلب من الجميع احترام الوقت وأوجه النظر المطروحة لكي ننهي النقاش بالوقت المحدد.

قبل طرح الأسئلة سوف أوزع اتفاقية المشاركة والسرية. سوف أقرأ العبارات لكم ثم أطلب منكم توقيعها أو طرح أي أسئلة واهتمامات واستفسارات. سوف أجمعها ويمكنكم الاحتفاظ بنسخة حيث أن بيانات التواصل متوفرة عليها.

كما نرجو كتابة الأسماء الثنائية عليها فقط. أكرر أننا لن نستخدم أسمائكم الحقيقية في نتائج البحث وهوياتكم تبقى مجهولة لمن يقرأها.. ونضمن لكم السرية لكل ما يحدث في هذه القاعة.. نرجو منكم المعاملة بالمثل.

Appendix 12 All consent forms

I, the below signatory confirm that:

- I have understood the information about the research presented on (x/x/xxxx) for the above study.
- My participation is voluntary
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily
- I may withdraw at any time without giving reason and without any consequences for me (even after the interview, at which point the data will be deleted)
- I have been informed that the interview will be recorded and I give my consent for this recording to be made
- I understand that all information I provide will be treated as confidential and will be anonymised
- I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes from my interview in publications and presentations arising from this study
- I agree that the data will be stored with the researcher and records may be kept for future follow-on studies in its anonymised form
- Any data collected electronically will be secured with end-to-end encryption and stored in an encrypted folder.
- I agree to take part in the above study

موافقة المتدرب على المشاركة

أقر أنا الموقع أدناه:

- أن معلومات البحث التي قدمت لي في (التاريخ) واضحة وشاملة
- أن مشاركتي بالمقابلة اختيارية
- أعطيت الوقت الكافي لمراجعة المعلومات وللاستفسار عن أي غموض في الأسئلة
- حصلت على أجوبة مقنعة لأي استفسار متعلق بالبحث
- لي الحق بالانسحاب من غير أي عواقب وبأي وقت حتى بعد المقابلة (سوف تذف المعلومات حين ذلك)
- أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً
- أجوبتي وما تحتويه من معلومات سوف تعامل بتمام السرية وتبقى مجهولة المصدر
- أوافق على استخدام اقتباسات من أجوبتي في التقارير الناتجة عن البحث (مجهولة المصدر)

- أوافق على احتفاظ الباحث على المعلومات لاستخدامها بدراسات مستقبلية مع تغيير الأسماء للاحتفاظ بالسرية
- جميع البيانات المرسله الكترونيا سوف تكون مشفرة للجهات الخارجية ومحفوظة في ملفات مشفرة
- أوافق على المشاركة بهذه الدراسة

Parent Consent for Focus Group Participation

Assalamu Alaikum

We are writing to inform you that your daughter/son is invited to participate in an academic study for a PhD student during school hours by participating in a collaborative interview (focus group) for a maximum of 90 minutes with a group of other students, discussing their academic and work decisions. The purpose of the study, titled "Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Saudi Arabia; the Career Decision Making Process of Young People in the Eastern Province" is to learn about the decision making of young men and women, and the effect of social, economic and family factors on their decisions and individual actions, in order to better design post-secondary work and training policies that are based on young people's lives, opportunities and needs, and align these with the local Saudi context. The study has been approved by the appropriate revision bodies at the University College London's Institute of Education, and approval has also been sought by the administration of your son/daughter's school/institute, according to the following:

1. Participation is voluntary
2. Your child's participation will not affect their academic performance
3. All data will be handled confidentially by the research team
4. The students will participate in a recorded focus group that can only be accessed by the research team
5. The recording will be used to document the answers and then erased
6. Personal information will not be shared with anyone outside of the focus group
7. Any direct quotes used in the research reports will be anonymised
8. You may agree to participate and change your mind after that

9. If you choose to withdraw after the data is collected I will delete the data and it will not be used.
10. Whatever decision is made about participation will not carry any consequences
11. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints or you believe that the research may harm you in any way you can contact the researcher by phone or e-mail Hanaa.almoaibed.14@ucl.ac.uk +966501999494
12. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints that were not addressed by the researcher you may contact the researcher's supervisor directly.

Dr Alison Fuller Alison.fuller@ucl.ac.uk

Thank you,

Hanaa Almoaibed

Not responding to this form by _____ indicates that you do not object to the student's participation. If you do not want the student to participate, please tick the box below and sign your name.

I do not agree to my child's participation

Name of student:

Date:

Parent's signature:

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

ابنك/ابنتك مدعو/ة للمشاركة في بحث دراسي لطالبة دكتوراه خلال الدوام المدرسي وذلك عن طريق المشاركة في نقاش جماعي لمدة 90 دقيقة كحد أقصى مع مجموعة من الطلاب/الطالبات حول طريقة اتخاذ القرارات الدراسية والعملية. الغرض من الدراسة تحت عنوان "التدريب التقني والمهني في المملكة العربية السعودية: عملية اتخاذ القرارات المهنية لدى الشباب والشابات في المنطقة الشرقية" هو التعرف على عملية "اتخاذ القرار" لدى الشباب والشابات ومدى تأثير العوامل الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والعائلية على قراراتهم وأفعالهم الفردية، وذلك من أجل البحث في أفضل سياسة لتوفير الفرص التعليمية والتدريبية ما بعد المرحلة الثانوية للطلاب السعودي من واقع حياته وفرصه واحتياجاته للتأكد من موائمة الفرص مع الوضع الراهن في المملكة.

مع العلم بأن تمت الموافقة على البحث من قبل مجلس المراجعة المختص بذلك في جامعة يونيفرستي كولدج لندن وتمت الموافقة على الدراسة من قبل إدارة المدرسة المشاركة حسب الشروط التالية:

1. خيار المشاركة أو عدمها متروك لك وللطالب
2. تم الاتفاق مع المدرسة أن مشاركة ابنكم لا يؤثر على أدائهم الأكاديمي
3. تعامل جميع البيانات بكامل السرية من قبل فريق البحث
4. مجموعة الطلاب/الطالبات سوف يشاركو بحلقة نقاش مسجلة صوتيا مع فريق البحث فقط
5. التسجيل سوف يكون من أجل تدوين المشاركات من قبل الباحث ثم تمسح
6. لا تشارك المعلومات الشخصية مع أحد خارج الحلقة النقاشية
7. لا تنسب المقتبسات المستخدمة في تقرير البحث لصاحبها
8. يمكن أن توافق على المشاركة الآن وتغير رأيك بعد ذلك
9. اذا أردت الانسحاب من الدراسة بعد جمع البيانات يمكنكم التواصل معي وسف تتلف البيانات ولا تستخدم
10. أيما كان قرارك فإن ليس هناك أي عواقب لذلك
11. اذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو اهتمامات أو شكاوي أو تعتقد أن البحث قد يضر بك يمكنك التواصل مع الباحثين عن طريق الهاتف أو البريد الإلكتروني

Hanaa.almoaibed.14@ucl.ac.uk

+966501999494

12. اذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو اهتمامات أو شكاوي لم يتم الإجابة عليها يمكنك التواصل مع الدكتورة المشرفة على البحث

Dr Alison Fuller alison.fuller@ucl.ac.uk د. اليسون فولر

شاكرا لكم اهتمامكم

مع التحية

هنا عبد الله المعبيد

عدم الرد على هذا الخطاب بتاريخ _____ يعني الموافقة على المشاركة

أما اذا لا ترغب بمشاركة ابنك/ابنتك بالدراسة الرجاء الإشارة الى ذلك أدناه والتوقيع

لا أرغب بمشاركة ابني/ابنتي

أسم الطالب/الطالبة

التاريخ

توقيع ولي الأمر

Institution's Consent to Participate

I, the below signatory _____ in my capacity as _____ at _____ agree to participate in the academic study on career decision making that is being run by Hanaa Abdulla Almoaibed, PhD candidate from the University College London's Institute of Education.

I confirm that I have been briefed on the subject of the research and purpose of it, and the agreement to participate includes:

1. I agree to allow a group of students from my institution to participate in focus groups and individual interviews during school hours and outside of them
2. I agree to distribute parental consent forms if there is a need for this
3. Each students' agreement to participate is at the student's discretion
4. Agreement or refusal of participation from the student shall not affect their academic achievements or their treatment by their teachers or administrators at the institute
5. All data will be handled confidentially by the research team
6. All shared information in final reports will be anonymised and students and institutes will not be identifiable in any way
7. Students' names will be changed and anonymised when using direct quotes
8. Data will only be used for the agreed purpose of the study, and all data will be destroyed after analysis and at the end of the research project
9. The participating institute may obtain a final copy of the study if desired by contacting the researcher and requesting this
10. The institute's participation is voluntary and may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.
11. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints or you believe that the research may harm you in any way you can contact the researcher by phone or e-mail
Hanaa.almoaibed.14@ucl.ac.uk
+966501999494
13. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints that were not addressed by the researcher you may contact the researcher's supervisor directly.

Dr Alison Fuller Alison.fuller@ucl.ac.uk

Name: Date: Signature:

موافقة المؤسسة على المشاركة

أوافق أنا الموقع أدناه _____ المسؤول في _____ للمشاركة في

البحث الدراسي حول اتخاذ القرارات العلمية والعملية والمقام من قبل هناء عبدالله المعبيد طالبة دكتوراه في جامعة معهد

التعليم التابع ليونيفرستي كولج لندن University College London's Institute of Education

حيث أنني على اطلاع على موضوع البحث والهدف منه وهذه الموافقة تشمل الشروط التالية:

1. السماح لمجموعة من الطلاب المشاركة في الحلقات النقاشية والمقابلات الفردية خلال وقت الدوام أو خارجه

2. توزيع خطابات الموافقة للطلاب ولأولياء الأمور عند الحاجة لذلك

3. السماح لمشاركة الطلاب يكون برغبة الطالب التامة

4. لا تؤثر موافقة الطالب أو عدمه على مستواه الأكاديمي أو معاملته من قبل المعلمين والاداريين في المدرسة

5. جميع البيانات تعامل من قبل فريق البحث بكامل السرية

6. لا تنشر أي معلومات بطريقة يمكن معرفة هوية الطالب أو الجهة التي ينسب له

7. يتم تغيير أسماء الطلاب عند استخدام أي مقتبسات من البيانات

8. سوف تستخدم البيانات للغرض المتفق عليه فقط لا غير كما أن البيانات الأساسية سوف تتلف عند الانتهاء من تحليلها وكتابة تقرير البحث

9. يمكن للجهة المشاركة الحصول على الصورة النهائية للبحث عند الرغبة وذلك عن طريق التواصل مع الباحث

10. مشاركة المؤسسة اختيارية ويمكن للمؤسسة الانسحاب من البحث في أي وقت من غير عواقب

11. اذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو اهتمامات أو شكاوي أو تعتقد أن البحث قد يضر بك يمكنك التواصل مع الباحثين عن طريق الهاتف أو البريد الإلكتروني

Hanaa.almoaibed.14@ucl.ac.uk

+966501999494

13. اذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو اهتمامات أو شكاوي لم يتم الإجابة عليها يمكنك التواصل مع الدكتورة المشرفة على البحث

د. اليسون فولر Alison Fuller Alison.fuller@ucl.ac.uk

الاسم التاريخ التوقيع

Appendix 13 Focus Group Questioning Guide

السؤال/النشاط Question/activity (The questions below are a guide and should be covered in a similar order, but facilitator should be flexible to pick up on the flow of the conversation and adjust if necessary)	الوقت Time	
1. كل طالب يعرف بإسمه الأول وقسمه ثم يكتب اسمه على البطاقة ويضعها على صدره Each student should introduce him/herself and their specialisation	2 د. 2 minutes	
2. ممكن تعطوني نبذة عن هذه الكلية/ المعهد/ المكان الذي تتدربون فيه؟ اسم المكان، طبيعة التدريب، الرؤية والغاية الخ Please tell me a bit about this college/institute. What kind of training is offered, what kinds of things do you do? What is the purpose of it?	2 د.	
3. ما هي الفرص الدراسية المتوفرة للطالب بعد الانتهاء من المرحلة الثانوية؟ نكتبها جميعا على السبورة ونشجع الطلاب للتفكير بغيرها. نقوم بتصوير الأجوبة بعد ذلك هل هذه الفرص متاحة للجميع؟ لماذا؟ هل كانت متوفرة لكم أنتم؟ لماذا؟ وما هي التجارب التي مررتم بها مع الفرص التي ذكرتموها؟ What are the opportunities available to a student after secondary <i>This will be done as a brainstorming flipchart activity (Barbour, 2007, p. 86) where different aspects of one's background are written down by the facilitator. The facilitator may wish to ask if anyone disagrees with any of them or if some of them are more relevant than others to anyone.</i> Are these opportunities available to everyone? Why or why not? Were they available to you?	8 د.	
4. ما هي العوامل التي تؤثر على قرار الشخص للالتحاق بالتدريب التقني فضلا عن فرصه أخرى بشكل عام؟ نشاط: نوزع ورقة العمل قد يبدأ الطلاب الجواب عن هذا السؤال قبل طرحه نتيجة السؤال السابق.. حين ذلك نكتبها جميعا على السبورة ونشجع الطلاب للتفكير بغيرها والتحدث عنها. What are the factors that influence a person's decision to go into vocational training instead of another opportunity? (handout the worksheet) The students could begin to answer this question as part of a response to Q3. If that is the case then list them on the board and encourage students to think about more and discuss them هناك مجموعة من الصور المرقمة.. التي تمثل العوامل الاجتماعية (مذكورة أدناه) التي تؤثر على القرار.. واكتبوها حسب الترتيب في الجدول الأول. اذا في عوامل لم تجدوها اكتبوها يدويا. ونقوم بتصوير الأجوبة بعد ذلك	10 د.	
المسافة من المنزل/ المواصلات Distance of college/transportation الساعات التدريبية Training hours/timetable المنهج Curriculum التخصصات المتوفرة specialisations	المسميات الوظيفية Job titles الوظيفة الحكومية Government employment الراتب Salary المعدل الدراسي GPA	سمعة الوحدة التدريبية Reputation of training institute الواسطة Wastas اذا التدريب منتهي بالتوظيف If the training includes employment مدة التدريب

الميل Preferences القدرة على استكمال الدراسة Ability to pursue further studies الابتعاث Scholarships for studying abroad	الأصدقاء Friends الصحة Health الحالة الاجتماعية Socioeconomic status الثقة confidence	Length of training نظرة المجتمع للشخص (البرستيج) Society's perception of a person ضغط الأقارب Pressure from relatives	
There are several numbered photos that represent some social factors that may influence decisions... rank them in the order of importance in your opinion. If there are other factors that you do not see, write those instead/as well			
8 د. 5. ممكن أحد يحدثني عن التجربة التي مررتم بها عندما اتخذتم القرار للتسجيل في هذه الكلية ؟ أعطوني فكرة عن سبب وجودكم هنا .. وتسجيلكم في المعهد.. ؟ هل سجلتم بمكان آخر قبل.. كيف سمعت عن الكلية؟ ماذا قرأت؟ هل هناك دور لأحد آخر في اتخاذكم للقرار الخ (هنا نستطيع شرح كيفية التعامل مع العوامل المذكورة في السؤال السابق وتصرفات الشخص عندما يخضع لها.. والاختلاف بين التصرفات والقرارات لاختلاف الدوافع) وما هي طبيعة النقاشات التي حصلت بينكم وبين أهلكم؟ هل كان هناك اتفاق أو اختلاف؟ Could someone tell me about your experience when you enrolled here? Give us an idea of why you are here.. did you enrol somewhere else first? How did you hear about the college? What did you read? Was someone else involved in your decision, etc. (we can relate this to the previous question and how people behave when confronted with different life circumstances, and how decisions and behaviour change due to the influence of the factors) What kind of conversations did you have with your family? Did you agree/disagree?			
10 د. 6. نشاط من وجهة نظركم ما هي الوظائف أو المجالات التي لها أعلى قيمة لكم شخصياً؟ هناك مجموعة أخرى من الصور المرقمة.. كل واحدة تمثل مجال عمل مختلف. صنّفوها في الجدول الثاني حسب الأهمية. إذا لم تجدوا مجال معين يمكنكم كتابة المجال. ومن وجهة نظركم ما هي المجالات التي لها أعلى قيمة لأهلكم؟ صنّفوها في الجدول الثالث ومن وجهة نظركم ما هي المجالات التي لها أعلى قيمة للمجتمع؟ صنّفوها في الجدول الرابع Activity: In your opinion, what are the jobs/fields that you personally value? There are more numbered photos that represent different jobs. Rank your top three in the second table on the worksheet. If there is another job, write it in. And from the point of view of your family, in your opinion? Rank them in the third table on the worksheet. And from the point of view of society? Rank them in the fourth table on the worksheet.			
5 د. 7. بعد تسجيلكم في المعهد هل تغيرت وجهة نظركم لأي من هذه العوامل الاجتماعية أو الشخصية؟ ما الذي ساعد على ذلك؟ المدرسين الشركات المناهج الخبرة الميدانية... ؟			

After enrolling in this college, did your opinion change about any of these factors, personal or social? What led to this change? Was it teachers, companies, the curriculum, work experience, etc.?	
هل لديكم فكرة عن الفرص الوظيفية التي متوفرة لكم بعد التخرج؟ اعطوني فكرة عنها واصفوا كيف تلتحقون بها	6 د.
Do you know of future work opportunities after graduation? Tell me a bit about them, and how you would pursue any of them.	
ما الذي تطمحون له بعد الحصول على شهادتكم؟ لماذا؟	5 د.
What do you aspire to after graduation? Why?	
هل هناك شيء تمنيت أن تفعله بحياتك ولكن لم تستطع؟ لماذا؟	5 د.
(ضغوط عائلية، توقعات اجتماعية، المعدل، غياب الواسطة) Is there something you wished you could have done in your life, but couldn't? why? (family pressures, social expectations, GPA, not having a wasta...)	
من بدأتوا الدراسة وحتى الآن، هل جرت الأمور حسب توقعاتكم؟	5 د.
Since beginning training, have things gone according to your expectations?	
هل لديكم أي إضافة؟ اقتراح؟	3 د.
Do you have anything else you would like to share? Any suggestions?	
الان نقوم بتوزيع الاستبيان ثم نذكرهم بوجود معلومات التواصل على ورقة المعلومات والاحتفاظ بها ان كانت لهم الرغبة في ذلك We now distribute the questionnaire. Remind the students that there are my contact details on the information sheet that they were given, and if they want to get in touch they can reach me at any time. شكراً لكم على مشاركتكم ونتمنى لكم التوفيق جميعاً Thank you all for participating and good luck to everyone	10 د.

Appendix 14 Bio-data questionnaire for focus groups

Gender	<input type="radio"/> Male	<input type="radio"/> Female
Marital status	<input type="radio"/> Married	<input type="radio"/> Engaged
	<input type="radio"/> Single	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Geographic location of residence	<input type="radio"/> Large city	<input type="radio"/> Rural area
	<input type="radio"/> Suburbs	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Region of origin	<input type="radio"/> Other Arab	<input type="radio"/> Southern
	<input type="radio"/> Central	<input type="radio"/> Eastern
	<input type="radio"/> Northern	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
	<input type="radio"/> Western	<input type="radio"/> Other: _____
	<input type="radio"/>	
Secondary education	<input type="radio"/> Public	<input type="radio"/> Private
	<input type="radio"/> General	<input type="radio"/> International
	<input type="radio"/> Vocational	<input type="radio"/> Outside Saudi Arabia
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Secondary school graduating score/current score if still in secondary	<input type="radio"/> 90-100	<input type="radio"/> 60-69
	<input type="radio"/> 80-89	<input type="radio"/> Below 60
	<input type="radio"/> 70-79	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Father's highest completed education	<input type="radio"/> Doesn't read or write	<input type="radio"/> Bachelor's
	<input type="radio"/> Reads and writes	<input type="radio"/> Master's or above
	<input type="radio"/> Primary	<input type="radio"/> Don't know
	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
	<input type="radio"/> General secondary	
	<input type="radio"/> Diploma	
Mother's highest completed education	<input type="radio"/> Doesn't read or write	<input type="radio"/> Bachelor's
	<input type="radio"/> Reads and writes	<input type="radio"/> Master's or above
	<input type="radio"/> Primary	<input type="radio"/> Don't know
	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
	<input type="radio"/> General secondary	
	<input type="radio"/> Diploma	
Father's sector	<input type="radio"/> Public sector	<input type="radio"/> Private sector
	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed	<input type="radio"/> Don't know
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Mother's sector	<input type="radio"/> Public sector	<input type="radio"/> Private sector
	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed	<input type="radio"/> Don't know
	<input type="radio"/> Homemaker	<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say

Father's occupation industry		<input type="radio"/> Public admin		<input type="radio"/> Agriculture & Mining
		<input type="radio"/> Defence		<input type="radio"/> Wholesale and retail trade
		<input type="radio"/> Education		<input type="radio"/> Maintenance
		<input type="radio"/> Human health and social work		<input type="radio"/> Manufacturing
		<input type="radio"/> Construction		<input type="radio"/> Business
		<input type="radio"/> Security		<input type="radio"/> Real estate
		<input type="radio"/> Other: _____		<input type="radio"/> Don't know
				<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Mother's occupation industry		<input type="radio"/> Public admin		<input type="radio"/> Agriculture & Mining
		<input type="radio"/> Defence		<input type="radio"/> Wholesale and retail trade
		<input type="radio"/> Education		<input type="radio"/> Maintenance
		<input type="radio"/> Human health and social work		<input type="radio"/> Manufacturing
		<input type="radio"/> Security		<input type="radio"/> Business
		<input type="radio"/> Other: _____		<input type="radio"/> Real estate
				<input type="radio"/> Don't know
				<input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
(Peterson, 2000, pp. 83-92)				

Appendix 15 In-depth interview guide

This guide is expected to be modified based on preliminary focus group analysis.

1. Tell me about your experience in coming to this college?
Probing opportunity: influence of family (parents, siblings)/teachers/friends
Probing opportunity: did you have other choices? What do you like or dislike about it?
2. What are you currently specialising in?
 - a. Tell me about why you are enrolled in your current specialisation?
 - b. What about other qualifications in the same college?
3. What kinds of job opportunities are there for someone in your field? In your city?
Do you think you will obtain one of these opportunities? Why or why not? Do you think your qualification is desirable?
4. Who typically successfully completes your course? And what about drop outs?
5. Has the college, teachers, administrators influenced your opinions and actions? Do you think if something changed it might be better for you?
6. In your opinion what aspects of one's background influence their decision to enrol in TVET?
7. How do people in your family talk about TVET? What about people in your community?
8. What kinds of careers are given more value than others?
How does this make you feel?
9. What do you aspire to do with your qualification? Why?
Probing opportunity: have you considered marriage, job, starting your own company?
10. Is there something you would have liked to do, but can't because of family or social expectations?
11. What kinds of things about Saudi Arabia affect your career outlook in general?
12. Have you or someone you know had an experience with a wasta?
13. Tell me about your life outside of college?
Probing opportunity: family, friends, sports, activities, travel; has this changed since enrolling in college? Have your social activities?

14. Do you ever feel pressure to behave in a certain way?
Probing opportunity: by who? How does this make you feel?
15. What is most important to young Saudis? Is it status? Income?
16. Have things worked out the way you expected so far?
17. Where do you see yourself in the next five years? What about others who have chosen a similar career path?

Appendix 16 Focus group activity handout

First name: _____

Table 1: Ranking social factors

Ranking	Photo number/factor
1	
2	
3	

Table 2: Ranking work opportunities (personal)

Ranking	
1	
2	
3	


Table 3: Ranking work opportunities (family)

Ranking	
1	
2	
3	

Table 4: Ranking work opportunities (society)

Ranking	
1	
2	
3	

Institute of Education



الإسم الأول: _____

جدول 1: العوامل الاجتماعية حسب الأهمية

الترتيب حسب الأهمية	رقم الصورة
1	
2	
3	

جدول 2: مجالات العمل - شخصي

الترتيب حسب الأهمية	رقم الصورة
1	
2	
3	

جدول 3: مجالات العمل - الأهل

الترتيب حسب الأهمية	رقم الصورة
1	
2	
3	

جدول 4: مجالات العمل - المجتمع

الترتيب حسب الأهمية	رقم الصورة
1	
2	
3	

UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL




image of actual handout

Appendix 17 Sample of focus group activity cards



الخبرة

experience



التخصص



نظرة المجتمع

الس في الكسب عار

social perception

درجته العمومية	المعيار بالعربي	المعيار بالإنجليزي	رمز المعيار بالعربي	رمز المعيار بالإنجليزي	وزن المعيار من
٩٥ - ١٠٠	ممتاز مرتفع	Exceptional	أ+	A+	٥ر٠
٩٠ - إلى أقل من ٩٥	ممتاز	Excellent	أ	A	٤ر٧٥
٨٥ - إلى أقل من ٩٠	جيد جداً مرتفع	Superior	ب+	B+	٤ر٥
٨٠ - إلى أقل من ٨٥	جيد جداً	Very Good	ب	B	٤ر٠
٧٥ - إلى أقل من ٨٠	جيد مرتفع	Good	ب+	C+	٣ر٥
٧٠ - إلى أقل من ٧٥	جيد	Good	ج	C	٣ر٠
٦٥ - إلى أقل من ٧٠	مقبول مرتفع	High Pass	د+	D+	٢ر٥
٦٠ - إلى أقل من ٦٥	مقبول	Pass	د	D	٢ر٠
أقل من ٦٠	راسب	Fail	هـ	F	١ر٠
—	غير مكتمل	In - Complete	ل	IC	-
—	محروم	Denile	ح	DN	١ر٠
٦٠ وأكثر	ناجح دون درجة	Nograde - Pass	ند	NP	-
أقل من ٦٠	راسب دون درجة	Nograde - Fail	عد	NF	-
—	منسحب بغير	Withdrawn	ف	W	-

المعدل

GPA

Appendix 18 Sample of WhatsApp data

8/4/16, 10:57:50 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: ممن يسببلك احراج الصرح انه بحدعين الحديث بما يخص
8/4/16, 10:58:31 AM: Wadha: لا عادي
8/4/16, 10:58:42 AM: Wadha: خذي راحتك
8/4/16, 10:58:49 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: (:)
8/4/16, 10:59:48 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: ي وتذكركم اللحظة اللي سمعتي فيها عن فرصة التدريب
8/4/16, 11:00:04 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: مين اللي قاللك.. ايش كانت ردة فعلك الخ
8/4/16, 11:00:14 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: (: قصيلي القصة شوي
8/4/16, 11:00:48 AM: Wadha: تدريب ايش
8/4/16, 11:01:11 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: التدريب والوظيفة في المصنع
8/4/16, 11:01:27 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: يعني لما سمعتي عن الفرصة في شركة الزامل
8/4/16, 11:02:09 AM: Wadha: انا امي مطلقه
8/4/16, 11:02:34 AM: Wadha: وطلعت من بيت عمي
8/4/16, 11:02:43 AM: Wadha: الي كان متزوجها
8/4/16, 11:02:47 AM: Wadha: ورحت بيت اجار
8/4/16, 11:03:11 AM: Wadha: وبعدها انهانت في اجار البيت
8/4/16, 11:03:26 AM: Wadha: وقلت انا وأختي لازم نشغل
8/4/16, 11:03:32 AM: Wadha: ونساعد امي
8/4/16, 11:03:46 AM: Wadha: وبعد شهرين
8/4/16, 11:03:57 AM: Wadha: دقت وحده على امي تعرف
8/4/16, 11:04:22 AM: Wadha: شركة ازامل
8/4/16, 11:04:24 AM: Wadha: ودخلت اختي الكبيره
8/4/16, 11:04:41 AM: Wadha: وبعدها دخلت انا
8/4/16, 11:05:17 AM: Wadha: وهذا الي خلانا نشغل
8/4/16, 11:05:26 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: اها.. اختك بدأت قبلك بكثير؟
8/4/16, 11:05:30 AM: Wadha: عشان نساعد امي
8/4/16, 11:05:54 AM: Wadha: ايه سنه
8/4/16, 11:05:58 AM: Wadha: وبعدها دخلت
8/4/16, 11:06:12 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: هي أكبر منك؟
8/4/16, 11:06:23 AM: Wadha: انا بعدها دخلت
8/4/16, 11:06:43 AM: Wadha: ايه هي اول وحده
8/4/16, 11:07:01 AM: Wadha: وصارت سبر فايزر
8/4/16, 11:07:07 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: وكانت مرتاحة؟
8/4/16, 11:07:34 AM: Wadha: مافي شغل راحه
8/4/16, 11:07:41 AM: Wadha: لازم نتعب
8/4/16, 11:07:48 AM: Wadha: عشان نعيش
8/4/16, 11:07:53 AM: Hanaa Almoaibed: طيب تتوقعين كان اشتغلتني لو مو عشان امك؟
8/4/16, 11:08:13 AM: Wadha: لا كنت ادرس
8/4/16, 11:08:17 AM: Wadha: متوسط
8/4/16, 11:08:27 AM: Wadha: وعشان ظروفنا
8/4/16, 11:08:35 AM: Wadha: خليت المدرسه

Appendix 19 Samples of focus group data

Q.1. What opportunities are available to you after you graduate?

Anis

medicine and mechanics, and mechanics.. mechanics.. that's all, that's what I know

حاسب هندسة: أحمد

Ahmed

Computer engineering

انجليزي وممكن وطب هندسة: عادل

Adel

engineering and medicine and maybe English

الموضوع طرح لو طبيب حلو: يوسف

RA

nice, and what if we move to the subject of..

3:06.7 - 3:33.0 وعندك الانجليزي وعندك العسكري القطاع وعندك بأروعها والهندسة بأنواعه الطب عندك: عبدالله
واضح اللي هذا تقريبا ممفي بعد وايش التعليم

Abdulla

you have the different types of medicine and the different types of engineering and you have the military sector and English and education, and what else is there,

that's kind of the clear ones

3:34.0 - 3:52.7 في طبي ومسنار علمي ومسنار هندسي مسنار فيها الدمام جامعة مثلا مسنارات عدة فيها: عبدالله
تسمه عدة فيه العسكرية فيه والمعادن البترول فيها الدمام جامعة عن بجد طبعاً البترول وجامعة البترول جامعة

Abdulmalik

there are many tracks for instance in Dammam U there is an engineering track and a science track and a medical track and in KFUPM of course it's very different from Dammam U, there's petroleum and minerals, and military, and lots of, what do you



Hanaa Almoaibed

When asked about the post-secondary options they do not mention options, they mention specializations



Hanaa Almoaibed

Mechanics, here, it seems he's referring to mechanical engineering, but it isn't clear.

Hanaa Almoaibed

The assumption seems to be that the only post secondary options are going to university, and the choice is what to major in.



Hanaa Almoaibed

The students do seem to have a few specializations on a laundry list and repeat them. They also continue to mention things that are available in university.



Hanaa Almoaibed

Military seems to be mentioned as available in a four year university, although it is the only specialization that is not a 'bachelor's degree' that was mentioned by the students.

S: and my father

9:57

المحاور: مين المسؤول عن التوجيه المهني يا شباب؟

Q.7. and so who is responsible to give him career guidance?

RA

who is responsible for career guidance?

10:00

الطبية: المدرسين

Student: teachers

10:04

المحاور: المدرسين في المرحلة السابقة, و بعد مين مسئول يا شباب؟

عيسى يقول الوالد

و شادي يقول الوالده

و ناصر يقول أخوي

و هاني يقول خالي

عيسى يقول خويك, خويك وين؟

RA

teachers from the previous education level.. and who else? Eisa
says your father, Shadi says your mother, Nasser



Hanaa Almoaibed

They say teachers are responsible but only one student mentioned that the teachers are the ones who guided him to the institute



هل نحن بحاجة لاختبار القدرات؟

رؤية المركز
أن نكون مرجعاً عالمياً في القياس والتقويم.

رسالة المركز
تقديم حلول شاملة متكاملة لقياس المعارف والمهارات والقدرات وتقويمها، بمنهجية علمية،
إسهاماً في تحقيق العدالة والجودة وكثيية للاحتياجات التنموية.

١. ينبغي الاطلاع على شروط القبول في الجهات التي تشترط
اختبارات المركز.
٢. ينبغي التسجيل في اليوم والمكان المناسب لك خلال فترة
التسجيل المحددة.
٣. يجب الحضور للاختبار في الموعد الذي سجلت به.
٤. لا يمكنك دخول الاختبار بدون أصل البتات الشخصية الموضح
في هذا التذيير.
٥. سترسل نتائج الاختبار إلكترونياً إلى جميع الجهات التي تشترط
الاختبار، لذلك لا يتطلب منك احضار شهادة ورقية.

للتذكير

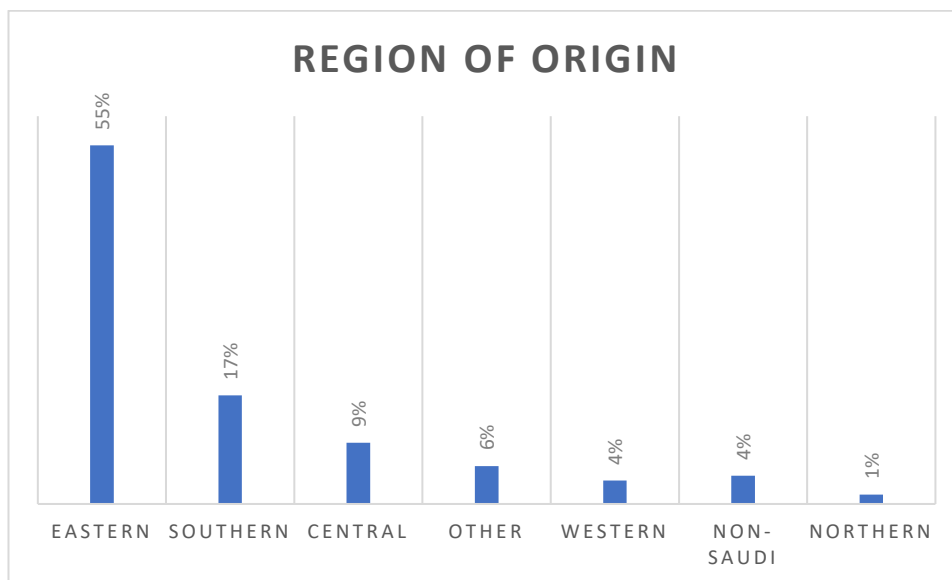
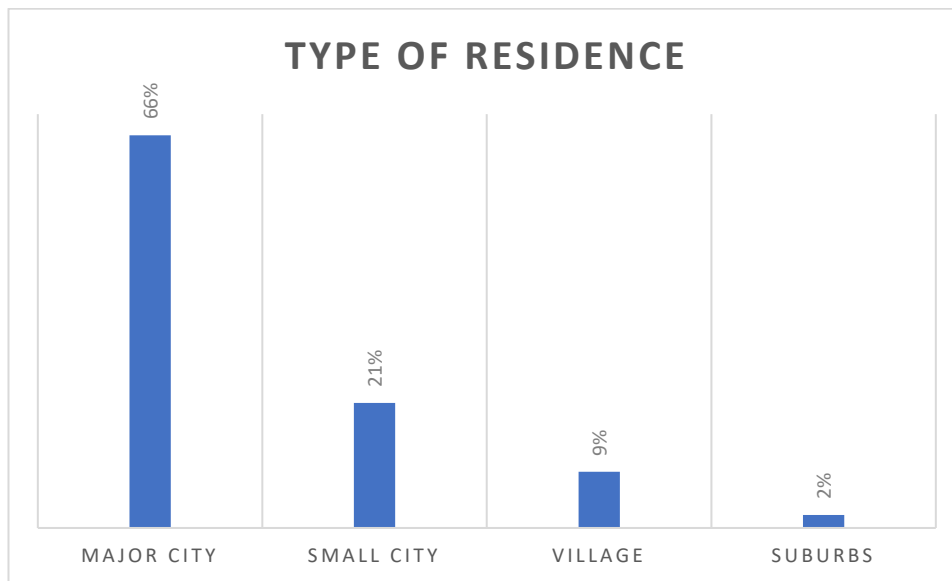
9200 33 555
+966 11 490 7000
faq@qiyas.org
P.O. Box 68566 Riyadh 11537

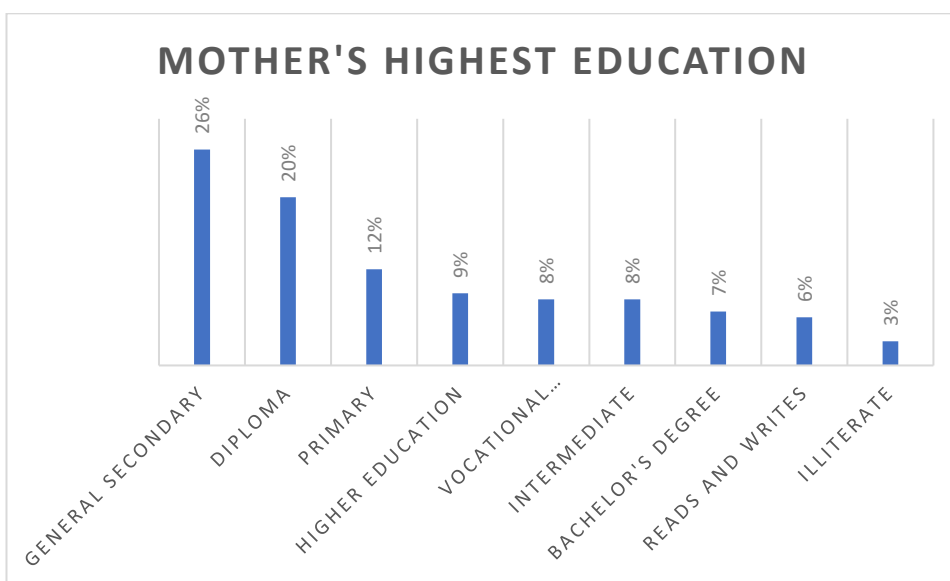
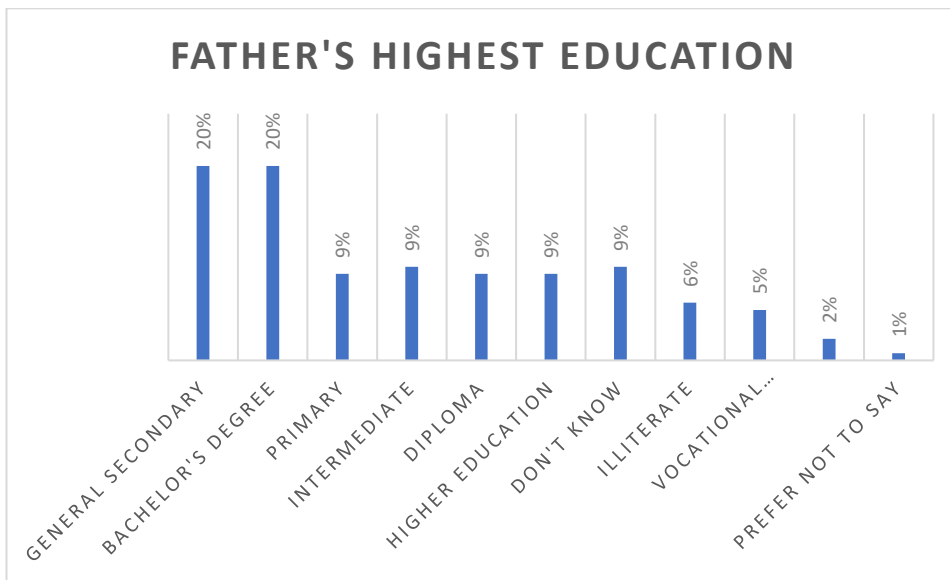
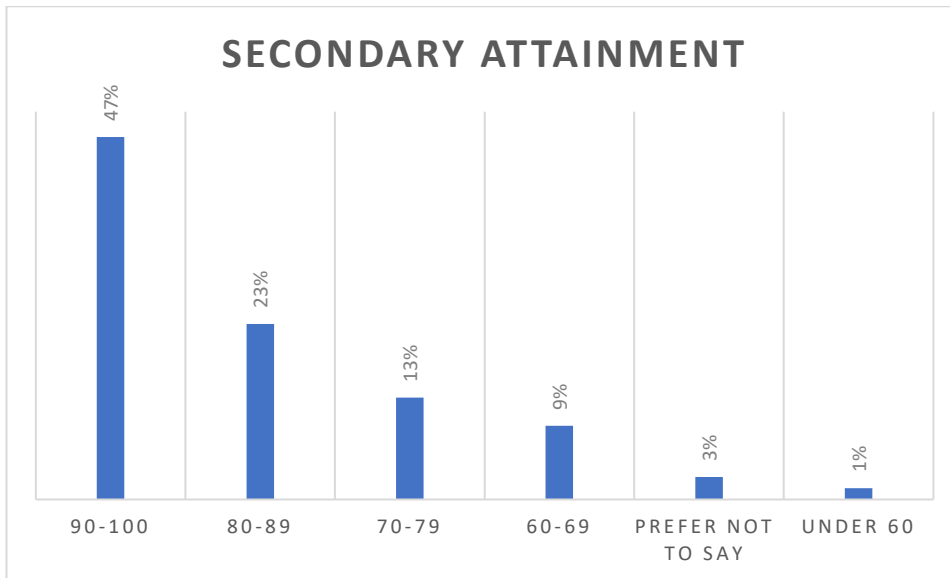


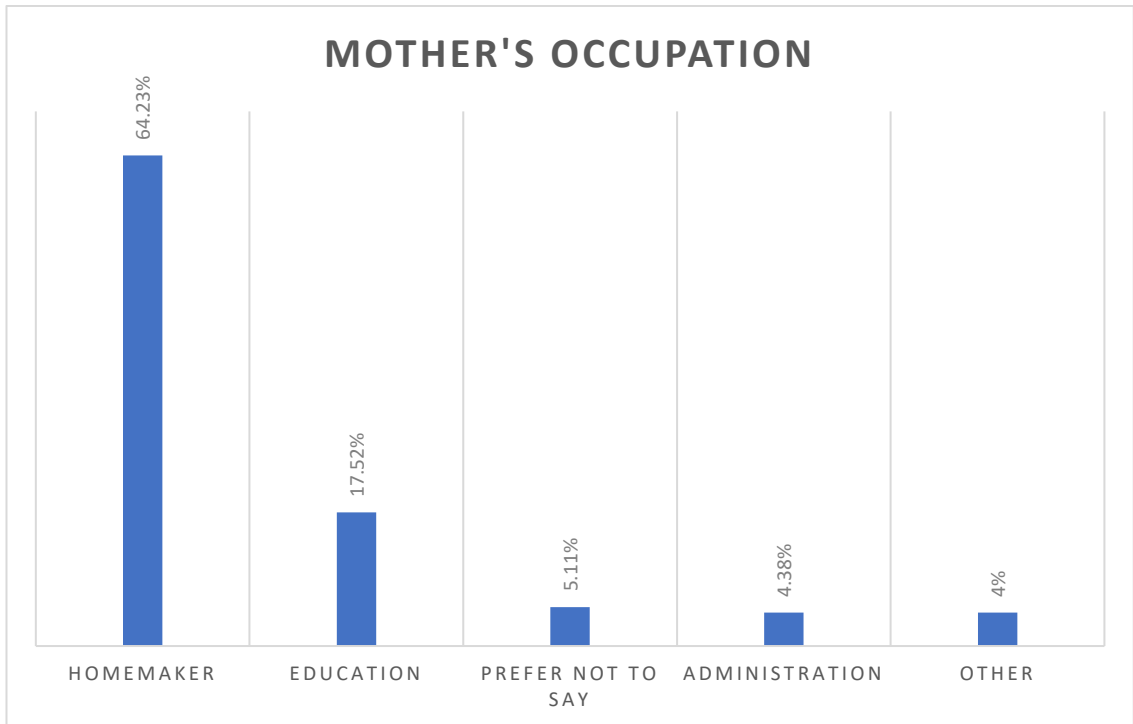
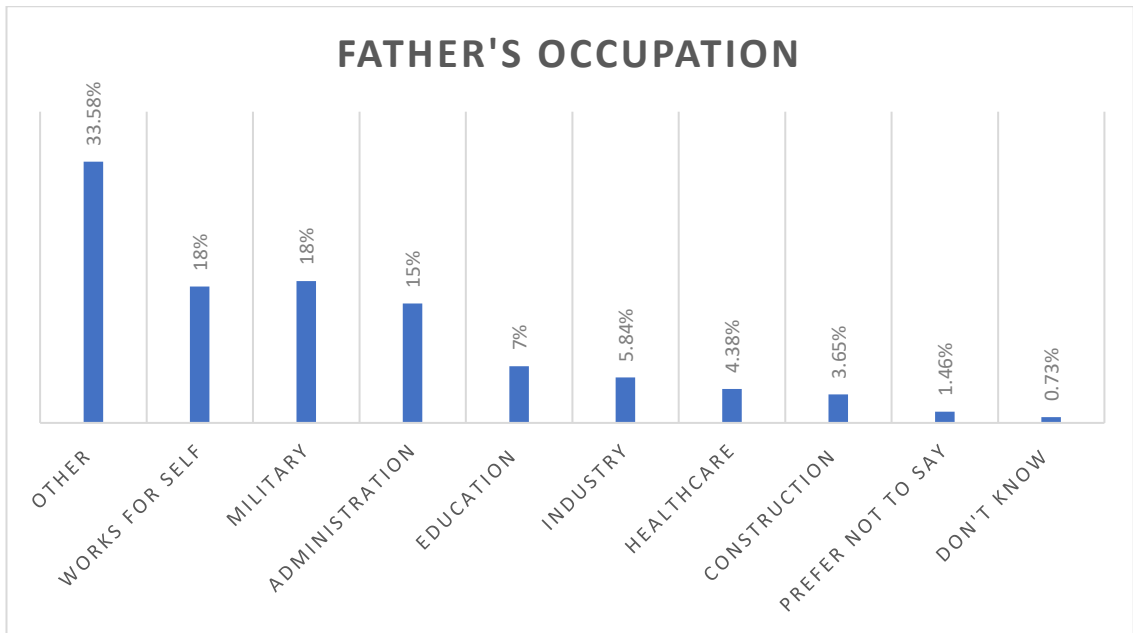
Appendix 21 Presentation used for research assistant training

<p style="text-align: center;">إدارة فوكس قروب (مجموعة مركزة) الاسم نحو الحيادية في تيسير نقاش مجموعة</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">تعريف الفوكس قروب</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• مقابلة جماعية في وقت محدد• تطرح مجموعة أسئلة عن موضوع واحد• ليس عبارة عن برزنتيشن (عرض) ولكن هدفها التعرف على الأفكار بعمق• المشاركون لهم تجربة مع الموضوع المطروح• الأجوبة على الأسئلة والحوار بين المشاركين الناتج عن الأجوبة لهم نفس القيمة التحليلية• مدير النقاش يبقى محايد ولا يبدو برأيه أبداً (بالعقل أو التواصل البدني أو النظرة أو نبرة الصوت أو طريقة التعقيب)
<p style="text-align: center;">دور مدير النقاش</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• يكون مبسر وليس خبير• طرح الأسئلة وتوزيع الأوراق والتأكد من تجهيز المكان• طلب التوضيح والتوسع في الإجابة• السماح للمشاركة الإيجابية والتفكير من غير طرح أسئلة• طلب الرد على مداخلات المشاركين الآخرين• من المفترض أن ليس لديه تجربة مع الموضوع• يعتبر المشاركين هم الخبراء	<p style="text-align: center;">الحيادية</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• تجنب المدح والتقدير (لا تستخدم كلمات مثل ممتاز/أحسن/إيرافو)• التعزيز عن طريق الشكر (استخدم عبارة مثل شكراً على المداخلة)• تجنب الأضداد (مشيطا/كسول أو ناجح/فاشل)• تجنب تخصيص الأفكار – تشجيع الطلب على تخصيص فكرته• عدم مشاركة أجوبة طلاب من مجموعات أخرى• عند الإجابة عن الأسئلة شارك حقائق وليس أفكار أو آراء• تجنب طرح أسئلة وطلب أسئلة من المشاركين
<p style="text-align: center;">حرية الإجابة والشرح</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• نسبة مشاركة مدير النقاش تكون 10-15% من إجمالي الحديث فقط• ترك الفرصة لنقاش بين المشاركين وليس فقط بين مدير النقاش والمشارك (ممكن تكون جميع البيانات مناقشات فردية إذا هذا الجزء لا يعزز)• عند تحليل النقاش الأفكار المطروحة بنفس أهمية الأفكار العائبة (لذلك تتجنب طرحها إلا من خلال الأسئلة الرسمية)• بعض الأسئلة الموجودة لتوسيع النقاش قد لا تكون مهمة إذا لم ينطرق لها المشاركون	<p style="text-align: center;">بعض النصائح السريعة</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• قد لا تتفق مع أجوبة الطلاب أو ترى أن أجوبتهم محدودة – لا تبين لهم وجهة نظرك ولا تطرح اقتراحات• لا تطرح الأسئلة لطلب من المشاركين شرحها لبعض• تتجنب طلب إجابة من كل طالب.. وطلب منهم التفاعل مع أجوبة زملائهم• مثال: اطلب بذكر أن الأصدقاء قد تكون أحد العوامل المؤثرة على قرارهم المهني بدلاً من تعزيز اجابته وطلب أفكار أخرى، ممكن يكون رندا: الأصدقاء.. كيف يعني؟ مرتبت بتجربة حسب استفسارك أترو على قرار تده؟ هل أحد تاني لديه تجربة؟ بين عم الأصدقاء؟ أبح• نوع الأجوبة هي المهمة وليس كميتها• الآراء الثرية غالباً ما تكون في الشرح وليس في الإجابة

Appendix 22 Characteristics of sample from bio-data questionnaire







Appendix 23 List and frequency of quoted students

	Name	Number of quotes		Name	Number of quotes
1.	Thamer	4	47.	Amjad	3
2.	Yahya		48.	Bandar	
3.	Aws	3	49.	Hussam	
4.	Ashraf	2	50.	Shorouq	
5.	Hani		51.	Hayat	
6.	Hamad		52.	Raya	
7.	Jassim		53.	Ghala	
8.	Ilyas		54.	Manar	2
9.	Jaber		55.	Najwa	2
10.	Noura		56.	Zaina	
11.	Samer		57.	Shereen	
12.	Marwan		58.	Ola	
13.	Nayef	2	59.	Bassam	
14.	Fawaz		60.	Wadha	
15.	Muhannad	3	61.	Sameera	
16.	Faisal	4	62.	Nora	
17.	Nahar		63.	Hissa	
18.	Hashim	3	64.	Fajer	
19.	Rami	8	65.	May	2
20.	Farid		66.	Bushra	
21.	Khalifa	2	67.	Nada	
22.	Latifa	3	68.	Arwa	3
23.	Bader	3	69.	Jawaher	
24.	Rashed	2	70.	Sulafa	
25.	Nabeel		71.	Firas	
26.	Khilil		72.	Salman	
27.	Fayez		73.	Ayoub	
28.	Unnamed	9	74.	Reham	
29.	Nawal	2	75.	Luay	
30.	Alaa	2	76.	Adel	
31.	Hatem				
32.	Haitham				
33.	Saud	4			
34.	Fahad	2			
35.	Mubarak	2			
36.	Nasser	4			
37.	Rakan				
38.	Baraa				
39.	Abdulaziz	2			
40.	Hisham				
41.	Tammam				
42.	Saeed				
43.	Yousef	2			
44.	Adib	2			
45.	Yamen				
46.	Ibrahim				