

National Youth Development Policies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE): How UAE's Policies and Programmes for Youth relate to and influence Young Emiratis Education and Career Choices

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

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Abstract

In diversifying its economy beyond oil income, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) faces a number of challenges, including developing Emiratis' skills and capabilities, improving the national education system and outcomes, creating job opportunities, rebalancing the social contract and addressing labour market fragmentation. In 2016, the UAE took the initiative to institutionalise the youth sector by appointing a youth minister and establishing the Federal Youth Authority (FYA). However, despite extensive government efforts to boost the employment of young nationals in the private sector, the saturation of Emiratis in the public sector continues. New policies have been introduced in parallel to bridge the talent gap and attract more foreign labour. Using a multi-stage design, my research investigated what influences FYA youth policies, what influences young nationals' choices around education and employment, and how Emirati youth perceive and engage with the government's efforts.

A qualitative approach was taken to explore the factors influencing government policy and to understand the perceptions of young nationals. This was done by examining 23 FYA documents, conducting one-on-one interviews with senior policymakers and policy practitioners in the UAE Government, and conducting focus groups with 54 young nationals. The research findings provide evidence which could serve UAE youth policymaking processes and better utilise young nationals' potentials in relation to the UAE's economic visions. This thesis tells a story about a relatively underexplored field in academic literature. The findings include information on how social and cultural structures influence young Emiratis' choices, how the pre-existing social contract shapes the attitudes of many youth (including their rentier mentality), and how political institutions influence policymaking and youth. Accordingly, this research provides recommendations and potential solutions to achieve more effective development among Emirati youth.

Impact statement

This thesis has involved a qualitative study of the UAE's youth sector, conducted by engaging directly with government policymakers, policy practitioners, and Emirati youth. The research first addressed policymaking processes from the government's viewpoint and how policies and programmes are designed and developed. It then explored how young Emiratis navigate their education and career choices to understand what influences their choices of study and employment. Last, it assessed how government efforts for youth under the Federal Youth Authority (FYA) related to youth choices, engagement and perceptions. In doing so, the research explored young people's aspirations and choices for education and employment alongside the government's initiatives, and undertook a critical analysis of the current top-down policy approach.

The UAE, similar to its neighbouring Gulf states, is often under-researched in academic literature. The empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions this research makes can be used as tools to analyse perceptions, rationales, and reveal gaps when investigating policymaking in similar economies. It has deployed a multi-design methodology to illuminate the experiences of policymakers and young people that future research can build on. While the findings are not generalisable, the approach could be used in future studies that adopt the analytical frameworks to assess youth and policy choices. The research also contributes to the wider literature on youth transitions, youth choices around education and employment, structure and agency studies in a Gulf context, and structural issues related to the case study. The research demonstrates how theoretical frameworks developed in the West can be applied in Gulf states.

My research offers insights into an evidence-based policy approach, and the data points can be used to inform policymaking in ways that extend to a stronger inclusion of young people's voices. The traditional approach of designing policies through top-down tools may be becoming less appropriate under contemporary conditions where countries and social groups are more connected. Young people's expectations are changing, reflected in the way they actively engage or disengage with what is offered to them. Finding a balanced approach which includes behavioural, social, and cultural aspects has the potential to better impact the motivation, attitudes, and perceptions of youth.

There is also an opportunity to ensure strong monitoring and evaluation of policies that can help to bridge any gaps from pre-institutionalisation to implementation.

Having conducted this research as a former government employee who worked on education and labour market policies for youth, I hope to use my network to influence policymaking in relation to youth development as a priority for the country. The UAE has big aspirations relating to economic diversity and growth. I am a firm believer that young nationals are capable of contributing to those goals if they are equipped with the right skills, knowledge, and development opportunities. This research shows that addressing social and cultural aspects, as well as other structural and perceptual issues, is required for effective policy reform.

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List of abbreviations

ADNOC	Abu Dhabi National and Oil Company
EYFG	Emirati youth focus group
EHRC	Education and Human Resources Council
FYA	Federal Youth Authority
FCSC	Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HCT	Higher Colleges of Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MoCA	Ministry of Cabinet Affairs
MoCY	Ministry of Culture and Youth
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHRE	Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation
NEET	Not in employment, education, or training
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
WEF	World Economic Forum

Glossary of terms

Abu Dhabi	Capital of the United Arab Emirates
Alruwais	A suburban city located approximately 240 km west of Abu Dhabi
Bedouin	Arabic term for <i>tribal family</i>
<i>Fakhir</i>	Arabic word translating to pride. It is an initiative in the UAE developed to celebrate males who spent time in the National Service
Gulf Cooperation Council	A council for Gulf states comprising the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman
Islam	Abrahamic monotheistic religion led by prophet Mohammed, the religion's founder
<i>NAFIS</i>	Arabic word meaning <i>to compete</i>
United Arab Emirates	Federal monarchy state in the Gulf consisting of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Ras Al khaima, Umm Al Qaiwain, Sharjah, and Fujairah
Vision 2021	Economic vision the UAE had with four main objectives: to ensure Emirati nationals can contribute effectively to the socio-economic growth of the country and sustain it, to ensure strong union among the Emirates, to develop a knowledge-based economy, and to ensure the prosperity of Emiratis
Vision 2071	The UAE's Centennial 2071 vision to be the "best country" in the world. The vision is built on four pillars: a future-focused government, excellent education, a diversified knowledge economy, and a happy and cohesive society
<i>Wasta</i>	Arabic word which refers to having a mediator or mediators using connections and favouritism as a system

Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has foregrounded its intention to focus on Emirati youth and put them at the top of its policy agenda (UAE Government, 2023d). Young Emiratis between the ages of 15 and 35 years are estimated to account for 49 per cent of the total UAE Emirati population¹ (Federal Youth Authority [FYA], 2024). There are multiple examples of government initiatives that have been developed to support young nationals, such as increasing the number of educational scholarships offered by the Ministry of Education and other government agencies, and increasing the number of job opportunities through nationalisation campaigns like the *NAFIS* (“to compete” in Arabic), which was introduced in 2021. Additionally, the UAE’s leaders are increasingly heard to encourage young people to play a more active role in the country’s economic growth. For example, in 2021, the Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, tweeted the following: “On International Youth Day, we say to the youth of the Emirates: the future is in your hands” (The National, 2021a, para. 5). As an indication of the UAE’s commitment to supporting its youth, in 2016, Shamma Al Mazrui, was appointed as Minister of State for Youth Affairs at the age of 22, making her the youngest cabinet minister in the world. Her remit included raising youth issues and their aspirations in the Ministers’ Cabinet and creating development plans and strategies to help young people fulfil their potential (Federal Youth Authority, 2024d).

The government’s focus on young nationals aligns with its goal to support the development of the skills and capabilities of this demographic. To this end, the Federal Youth Authority (FYA) was established in 2018 as a new entity with a vision “to create the best model for investing in Youth to serve their country and carry the torch into the future” (Federal Youth Authority, 2024d, para. 1). It additionally promoted the vision of “invest[ing] in youth’s energy, our most valuable resource, by nurturing their character, developing the environment that surrounds and shapes them, and maximising their participation” (Para. 2). More recently, in the 2020 UAE Government reshuffle, the FYA became part of the Ministry of Culture and Community Development². It is unclear why this happened so soon

¹ Emirati population refers to Emirati nationals only. UAE population refers to both nationals and non-nationals living in the country.

² Renamed to Ministry of Culture and Youth after the Cabinet’s reshuffle in 2020.

after the establishment of an independent agency for youth and before the efficacy of policy initiatives had been evaluated.

As will be discussed further, the UAE government's focus on Emirati youth has taken place in an environment that is changing rapidly on many fronts. For example, we also have government initiatives aimed at moving the country away from oil and at reducing the country's reliance on foreign labour. My research aimed to explore the interrelationship between these factors based on recent changes in the youth sector and the UAE's growth vision. Specifically, the research focuses on understanding the country's approach to youth policies, how young people make their education and career choices, and how the UAE policies for youth and their choices of education and career relate to each other.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. It begins with an introduction to the UAE as the case study for my thesis, outlining the changes and challenges in the UAE's economy, labour market, and vision. It then highlights the research questions that helped to guide the study, before providing an outline of my personal motivation to conduct this research. The chapter concludes by outlining how the thesis is organised.

1.1 Contextualising the case study

In providing context with regard to the UAE, this section explains why young Emirati nationals are critical to the development of the country, the role they are expected to play, and the importance of their engagement. Youth are critical in terms of the challenges faced by the UAE, such as those relating to the economy and the country's competitiveness on a global stage. An important contextual factor is the UAE's high reliance on foreign labour, with Emiratis making up only 11 per cent of the total population³. If young people are disengaged, uninterested, and their skills and capabilities are not strong, this will impact the UAE's growth, as explained later in the chapter. In 2020, the UAE's youth unemployment rate for those aged 15–24 years rose to 14 per cent. This compares with 7.6 per cent in 2019⁴, a rise that can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic and other factors which have not yet

³ <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/>

⁴ Youth unemployment includes the whole population of the UAE. In my research, I focus only on young Emiratis for feasibility reasons since the government's youth efforts are mainly targeted at national youth. Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.NE.ZS?locations=AE>

been explored. While both rates are high in comparison to advanced economies and the global average, which stood at 17.2 per cent in 2020, according to statistics provided by the World Bank (2020), this can still be considered high for the UAE and problematic for its young people.⁵ Given the government's commitment to rapid economic growth and its desire to compete globally (as evidenced by its increasing global rank)⁶, the rise in unemployment among the country's youth necessitates greater investigation and understanding.

Given that Emiratis form a small minority of the total UAE population, the reliance on foreign labour in the workforce is likely to continue for some time (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011). However, little is known about the extent to which Emiratis actively participate in the economy and contribute to economic growth. The extent of the government's efforts and investment in youth suggests that the skills and capabilities of young Emiratis are critical to the country's vision of growth and development. An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2015, p. 3) report focusing on the importance of skill development to address the increasing unemployment rate among youth in the UAE stated the following:

Better skills have become the key to better jobs and better lives. This is an important message for the United Arab Emirates and many of its neighbours: the wealth that lies hidden in the undeveloped skills of their populations is far greater than what they currently reap by extracting wealth from natural resources.

When we look at the UAE government's approach to youth unemployment, different efforts can be seen, such as creating jobs, supporting entrepreneurship, dedicating local funds to solve the problem, and supporting employment in the private sector. This research explores what this policy emphasis and activity could be signaling about the government and policymakers' concerns and priorities, and whether there might be unintended effects. For example, this highly active approach

⁵ According to Ministry of Economy published data, Emiratis GDP per capita is \$43,000. Source: <https://www.moec.gov.ae/en/uae-lifestyle>

⁶ For example, in 2019, the WEF Global Competitiveness Report ranked the UAE 25th in the Global Competitiveness Index (UAE Government, 2023c).

could be instilling a sense of entitlement in young Emiratis who may continue to expect the government to provide opportunities and resolve any employment challenges they face.

In his research, Hertog (2020) illustrated how Gulf citizens' attitudes are compatible with rentier mentality traits. Theory that could apply in this context includes ideas about rentier states and the rentier mentality, the second of these being where citizens of rentier states are convinced that their governments will resolve their employment challenges without them putting in effort to work hard. These notions are explored at the end of this section and further in Chapter 3.

Another factor potentially impacting the mindsets of Emirati youth, their motivation to study, work and contribute to the growth of the UAE, is the concept of the social contract, discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2. Young Emiratis may be incentivised to wait for the best opportunities to arise without putting in the work needed to build their skills and capabilities. Daleure's (2016) qualitative study investigating unemployment among Emirati youth illustrated how national job seekers continued to reject private sector employment even when they could not find jobs in the public sector. The study addressed several social and behavioural factors impacting the decisions made by Emirati youth, predominantly the role of the family in guiding youths' educational and career choices.

In 2005 the UAE Government first introduced the Emiratisation campaign (i.e., more jobs in the private sector taken up by Emirates). Since this time the government has aspired to move more of its nationals into jobs in the private sector and into entrepreneurship (Hertog, 2012). Parallel to this, in 2009, the government issued Ministerial Decree No. 176 to improve Emiratis' job security in the private sector (Marshall, 2018). The *Emiratisation* campaign aims to increase the participation rate of nationals in the private sector through imposing quotas on private sector employers to hire Emiratis. The employability of locals in the private sector is an issue across a majority of Gulf countries, which are also often referred to as resource-based economies where,

Oil wealth has fueled extensive welfare policies and cosy public-sector employment for Emiratis, ensuring a comfortable living standard. Therefore, they have fewer incentives to invest in higher qualifications, and private businesses need to pay high wage premiums to compete with those public-sector opportunities. (Schneider, 2021, p. 3).

National policies, including Saudisation, Omanisation and Bahranisation, alongside Emiratisation, are a way for governments to create jobs for their citizens by imposing certain criteria and requirements on private-sector employers. In the UAE, this policy requires private-sector employers to reserve managerial positions in government entities for Emiratis only (Reynolds, 2019). The government imposed a quota on the private sector where any company with more than 50 employees must recruit a specific number of UAE nationals to meet the minimum percentage declared by the government (UAE Government, 2023b). According to figures released by the UAE Central Bank, the private sector accounts for 81.5 per cent of all UAE employees, including nationals and non-nationals, making it the highest employing sector and critical to the economic growth of the country (Rebei, 2020). According to the Strategy& (2023) report on *The trends shaping the UAE's youth sector after the COVID-19 pandemic*, “78.2 per cent of employed UAE nationals worked in federal and local government entities, while 11.9 per cent worked in semi-government entities, and only 8 per cent worked in the private sector” (p.08).

The UAE government introduced a number of policies to increase the attractiveness of the private sector for Emiratis. This was achieved through adjustments in benefits, responsibilities, and expectations in both sectors with an aim to bridge the differences (Gulf News, 2019). However, despite the efforts made under the Emiratisation policy, for more than a decade, Emiratisation results are still unsatisfactory; as stated on the UAE Government official website under the targets of the National Agenda (launched in 2014) to “Increase Emiratisation in the private sector 10 times” (UAE Government, 2023b), and stating that if encouraging private sector employers to recruit nationals is not enough, the government will impose new measures to meet the Emiratisation targets⁷. This indicates that the vast majority of Emiratis continue to choose the public sector despite the policy reforms. Emiratisation, as discussed in more depth in the next chapter, has not yet achieved the desired outcomes. The Ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, issued a letter at the end of 2019 directed to federal and local authorities emphasising the importance of Emiratisation, stating “we are monitoring the process. Providing job opportunities for

⁷ See Appendix 16 for UAE labor market segmentation and more information.

citizens was and will remain a top priority, as is the case in countries of the East and the West” (Abbas, 2019, para.01). This signals a direct message and warning to push private sector employers to employ Emiratis.

The lack of success of the Emiratisation policy since it was launched in 2005 is evidenced by the UAE Government’s continued search for solutions to address the pervasive problem. For the period 2021–2025, the government is injecting AED 24 billion (USD 6.53 billion) to employ 75,000 Emiratis in the private sector through the NAFIS programme. As stated on the government’s official website (UAE Government, 2021a, para.02),

The UAE’s citizens will be offered a series of incentives to choose private-sector jobs, careers of national priorities and to launch their own businesses in the labour market. The Government will provide salary support, unemployment benefits, child allowance, pensions and several other benefits to enhance career competencies, vocational skills and talents for its nationals.

Specifically, the Emiratisation quota policy has become one of the 13 policies and programmes under NAFIS (see Chapter 2). NAFIS is “a federal programme to increase the competitiveness of Emirati human resources and empower them to occupy jobs in the private sector. Launched as part of ‘Projects of the 50’⁸, the programme aims to accelerate the UAE’s development journey and support the economy, and the dedication of local funds in support of Emirati Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (NAFIS, 2022). Moreover, with the announcement of the NAFIS programme in 2021, the Prime Minister of the UAE stated on his official Twitter account that the UAE has clear goals to increase the participation of Emiratis in the private sector, where the private sector is the future of employment (Abbas, 2019). As a multi-pronged initiative, NAFIS may help to generate better outcomes compared with the imposition of the previous quota system (Project on Middle East Political Science [POMEPS], 2019). It is too early to assess this, however. Additionally, questions remain about how the voices of the country’s youth are incorporated, as well as how the youth are perceiving and engaging in the abovementioned initiatives, all of which impact their education, career, and self-development choices.

⁸ Projects of the 50 is a set of programmes to support improving the economic and social development of the UAE and reutilising the government spending and local companies to have more than 50% dedicated to the development of the national economy by 2031 (UAE Government, 2023).

To support Emirati youth, the FYA introduced 23 policies and programmes, which will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 2. There has been little research about these initiatives and, consequently, there is a lack of understanding about how the policies and programmes are contributing to building young Emiratis' skills and capabilities in a practical sense, as well as how young Emiratis perceive and react to them. The scarcity of publicly available information raises questions about the impact of these policies in developing a competitive and skilled Emirati youth who are aligned with the government's vision (Cordesman, 2016; Maynard, 2008). My research aims to generate some empirically based provisional and formative insights into the FYA's efficacy. These efforts relate in many ways to the economic visions of the UAE and are contextualised for a more comprehensive understanding.

The UAE's economic vision has been changing and growing over the years to support the development of a knowledge economy and diversify income sources. The UAE has been one of the first Gulf states with a strategy to move away from oil-based income and create revenue sources from more environmental streams (The National, 2015; Emirates News Agency [WAM], 2018)⁹. The country has reduced its reliance on oil by investing in alternative energy sources, supporting private enterprises and entrepreneurship and improving its global ranking (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2017; Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center [FCSC], 2024a)¹⁰. In addition, in 2010, the UAE launched its Vision 2021 to be one of the *best countries* globally, a vision that encompasses the achievement of a competitive knowledge economy, sustainable environment and infrastructure, world-class healthcare, a first-rate education system, a safe public, a fair judiciary, a cohesive society, and a preserved identity (UAE Cabinet, 2024; UAE Cabinet, 2023a)¹¹. This will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, little is known about how its approach to and utilisation of human capital are contributing to its economic vision. In particular, the role and involvement of Emirati youth is unclear (Alameri, 2018).

Human capital is arguably key to a nation's sustainable growth and, in this regard, it is important to understand better how youth contribute to long-term growth. This thesis presents evidence

⁹ The non-oil GDP is around 70% of the national GDP.

¹⁰ According to the WEF Global Competitiveness Report 2016, the UAE ranked 25th in the Global Competitiveness Index. Source: <https://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-index-2016-2017/economy-highlights-united-arab-emirates/>

¹¹ The knowledge economy concept was first coined by Peter Drucker, who described it in his book "The Age of Discontinuity" as the use of knowledge from any field to support economic growth (1969). He concluded that, in the 20th Century, the economy will be based on knowledge and information, not capital and natural resources.

and knowledge through an exploration of the ways in which the government's policies and programmes for young people have been designed and implemented, and how young Emiratis perceive and engage with them in terms of their personal career and education choices.

In parallel to its Emiratisation policy, the UAE also announced a new citizenship law in 2021, which favours skilled global talent that can contribute to the country's economic vision¹². This new law can offer the government a shortcut to accelerate its movement towards a knowledge-based economy by attracting highly skilled and qualified foreign workers. On the other hand, it will have an adverse effect on local communities if it limits individuals' opportunities for skill development. Skill weaknesses are often highlighted by private-sector employers when it comes to hiring Emiratis. Additionally, the law may affect workforce segmentation as well as lead to bigger division between nationals and non-nationals working in different sectors in the UAE (see Chapter 2).

Even with Emiratisation, the country is likely to remain strongly dependent on foreign labour to fill skill shortages and capability gaps in the labour market (Alshaali, 2018; Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011). Arguably, the NAFIS programme (including the Emiratisation quota policy) and the new citizenship law are quite different approaches that the government may have designed to complement one another in attempts to fulfil the economy's labour and skill needs. Charles (2015) highlighted how the Emiratisation campaign might have had limited success as a result of the implicit social contract and influence of the rentier mentality, both of which might affect the attitudes of young nationals. Adding to the complexity are other factors such as state, traditions, society, and family that may also influence young Emiratis' behaviours and expectations. My research explores whether young Emiratis are evidently influenced by a certain mentality or not as a result to the abovementioned reasons (Charles, 2015). However, this is yet to be assessed given that both approaches are relatively new. In her commentary on the recent UAE Government's economic policies, Al Hussein (2021) identified that 13 of 50 policy initiatives focus on nationals' employment in the private sector through government incentives:

¹² The new citizenship law states that the UAE Emirati nationality will be officially attainable for foreigners nominated by UAE royals or government officials. The citizenship will be given to foreigners in certain professions (e.g., investors, doctors, specialists, inventors, scientists, talents, intellectuals, artists, and their families).

but nationalization may not be the answer to the talent gap that the government is keen on to remedy by the series of landmark announcements. There is a specific type of talent that the country wants to attract, and it has been cultivated outside of its constraining borders. Talent can only be fostered in an environment conducive to learning, innovation and creativity – an environment that no Arab country at the moment can provide or sustain (para. 9)

The government has also introduced legislation, programmes, and policy reforms to support gender equality and the role of women in the labour market. In 2015, the UAE Government established the Gender Balance Council (2020), which is responsible for developing and implementing its gender balance agenda (e.g., women in parliament must occupy 50 per cent of the Federal National Council's seats; men and women have the right to hold cabinet posts, with 29.5 per cent being female ministers; and the labour law has been amended to give women equal pay rights). As a result of the Council's work, the UAE has progressed to become a leading country in gender equality in the region, according to the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap report, where the UAE was able to close 71.6 per cent of the country's overall gender gap (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC. 2021; World Economic Forum, 2021)

The previous section outlined some of the major changes and challenges in the UAE's economy that affect the labour market and potentially youth. Examining these changes is an important component in better understanding what is expected from young nationals and how and in what ways they are engaging in supporting the UAE's economic growth and vision. The next sub-section provides information on the political context of the UAE and how this may have resulted in instilling the rentier mentality among young Emiratis. For my case study, this is critical to understand, as it may be affecting the way young nationals engage with their government's efforts (e.g., via the FYA and otherwise).

Introducing the rentier state theory (RST)

As previously highlighted, little is known about how young Emiratis engage and perceive the UAE Government's youth policies and programmes. This sub-section foregrounds the FYA's efforts on behalf of Emirati youth, providing a foundation for a more in-depth discussion in Chapter 2. As mentioned, the UAE Government has a long-established social contract as a result of the political structure that may have had an impact on setting certain expectations and instilling a specific mindset.

This research examines how the possibility of a rentier mentality may be influencing the decision-making of young nationals in terms of their education and career choices, including their views about public- and private-sector employment. The rentier mentality concept derives from rentier state theory (RST), or rentierism (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). It explains the political economy of countries that receive their income mainly through rent paid by other countries. In the UAE, similar to neighbouring Gulf states, a substantial amount of income comes from oil wealth. As explained, the UAE is keen on diversifying its income resources and encouraging productivity in the workforce. The RST suggests that those economies are characterised as unproductive in earnings, an apparent absence of citizens' engagement, and interest in politics taking a passive role in the economic growth (POMEPS, 2019; Tok, 2020; Zicchieri, 2016; Yamada & Hertog, 2020). Building on Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (1987)'s work on RST, the concept of the rentier mentality has evolved as a way of explaining the assumed mentality of citizens in those economies. Citizens have been encouraged to expect their governments to provide a generous welfare system in return for the State's political and economic autonomy (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). This theorisation will be explored through the different qualitative research methods employed to answer the main research questions developed for my research.

1.2 Research questions and approach

Having briefly explained the changes in the UAE's economic vision, workforce, and focus on youth, the following questions were developed to guide this research:

1. What influences the development of the UAE's youth policies?
2. What influences young Emiratis' education and career choices?
3. How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth and young Emiratis' education and career choices relate to each other?

To address the abovementioned research questions, I employed three methods in an exploratory qualitative study—specifically, document analysis of the 23 FYA policies and programmes, key informant interviews with policymakers and policy practitioners, and focus groups with a sample of Emirati youth. The rationale for the use of the FYA initiatives as the primary resource from the UAE

polymaking side is that this authority was established with the goal of serving the youth sector. While other government organisations may also be serving youth, they have other goals and segments beyond this demographic. The methodological approach was employed, first, to gain a better understanding of the design of UAE youth development policies, how these policies were chosen and what has influenced their development. Second, the methodology enabled an exploration of how Emirati youth make their career and education choices and what influences their decisions. Third, analysing these data can progress understanding of what this means for the relationship between the UAE Government's youth initiatives and young Emiratis' choices. The research questions could most effectively be explored through the use of a qualitative design that investigates policy documents, key informants' experiences of policy formation and development, and young people's perceptions and engagement with the relevant initiatives.

The Gulf region remains under-researched in the wider academic literature. It follows that this research provides an opportunity to create new knowledge about Emirati youth and UAE's youth polymaking through direct engagement with the relevant stakeholders. Given the exploratory nature of the research and its objectives, a qualitative approach is arguably the suitable and feasible to address the research aims identified (Cohen et al., 2017).

1.3 Personal motivations

My interest in pursuing doctoral research began when I was in my first year of university. I had a desire to complete my master's degree and a PhD. For the long-term, I knew I wanted to be a professor and teach. Upon completion of my master's degree, I worked in the public sector as a policy associate at the Education and Human Resources Council (EHRC) in the UAE. The EHRC is a federal entity that operates as a think tank for the government in matters related to education and labour market development for nationals. During my employment, I was exposed to working with ministers, polymakers, and advisors across the government and globally. The Council is chaired by Abdulla bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and has a board of ministers who work on different policies and programmes to improve the education and labour market conditions for Emiratis.

Through my work experiences, I noticed a divide between what the government aspires for young people and how youth appear to view those opportunities. For example, I remember vividly how conversations with my peers changed when the government announced the appointment of a 22-year-old youth minister, with many young Emiratis beginning to talk about their goals, including wanting to be ministers before 30. I was interested in asking the following: *Why do you think you deserve it?* People's responses, however, were vague and unsupported by evidence or a solid plan. Perhaps there was a sense of entitlement and lack of understanding about the need to work hard for a job and recognition. This experience piqued my interest in learning more about this area and formulating it as a potential doctoral research topic.

Another influence relates to my time of study at Columbia University, in the United States, where I was undertaking my master's degree. Based on numbers shared by the university during the orientation week, more than 95 per cent of the international students were from East Asia. This added to my curiosity: why were there not more Emiratis studying at top universities worldwide? There are plenty of scholarships offered by the government for those who want to study abroad as long as they meet the criteria and are accepted for admission. This availability of financial support should make it easier. At that point, I could not fathom why many young Emiratis had not been applying and competing for such opportunities.

I attribute my aspirations to study to my life experiences and the situations in which I have found myself. I was always motivated to study because I knew that education is key to securing a good career. I was raised by my father, who passed away when I was 16 years old. I knew that I must be financially independent and work hard to obtain a good career. Therefore, I invested all my energy into my studies as I did not have financial security. I moved from a public school to an international school for the chance to have a better education. Based on my high school grades, I then pursued an undergraduate degree at the American University of Sharjah, which is among the top universities in the UAE. I was sponsored by the Ministry of Presidential Affairs. Later, I applied to a number of universities in the US to continue my studies. When I was admitted to Columbia University, I attempted to obtain a scholarship from different government entities in the UAE and successfully secured one from the Ministry of Education, which is also sponsoring my doctoral study at UCL. I

understand that life experiences are individual and unique, and I wish to understand how young nationals' experiences differ and how those differences translate into the choices they make.

1.4 Overview of chapters

This thesis focuses on the case of the UAE and its youth sector, institutionalised in 2016. The first chapter highlighted the main changes, progress, and challenges relevant to my research. In Chapter 2, an overview of the UAE's political, economic, and demographic landscapes is provided, as well as the challenges the government faces with the solutions it has introduced to combat some of them. Chapter 3 presents a review of the extant literature, where rentierism, youth transition and policymaking frameworks are discussed. In Chapter 3, the main concepts and frameworks used in the research are identified. Based on the works of Yamada (2020), Gray (2011) and Hertog (2020), these include the concept of rentierism and how it may impact young nationals' mentalities. Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s three-dimensional framework investigating how intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors influence young people's career choices is then presented. Lastly, Hall's (1997) 3Is framework, which enables analysis and illumination of how institutions, interests, and ideas effect policy choices, is discussed¹³. Three methods of inquiry were employed to address my research questions. These include document analyses, key informant interviews with UAE policymakers and policy practitioners, and focus groups with young people. These methods and the data collection for the research are outlined in Chapter 4, along with ethical considerations. Using the relevant frameworks and concepts, chapters 5, 6 and 7 consider the findings from the data collected. Chapter 8 presents a summary of the findings related to the UAE's pace of development and a discussion on the influence of Hall's ideas lens of policymaking, before developing a comparison between the concepts of youth development and youth empowerment. The specific definition of each concept is critical to my thesis as they imply different specific meanings when used in different contexts both in the literature examined and more generally in discussions with the research participants, along with youth engagement. Further, the complexity of the relationship between the UAE Government and the country's youth is further illustrated. This can be illuminated through Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s

¹³ The order of the 3 lenses may differ throughout the thesis based on the points and findings discussed

framework, especially in the ways that interpersonal factors such as those relating to culture and social aspects impact young people's choices around education and employment. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis with a discussion of the main contributions of the research to knowledge, as well as a focus on the strengths and limitations of the study, the implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Contextualising the UAE: The Past, Present, and Future

The federal monarchy known today as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was founded in 1971 by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (Heard-Bey, 2017). The political structure and constitutional federation determine all levels and areas (e.g., education, employment, and welfare) of policymaking, with an aim to ensure the institutional stability of the federal monarchy (Heard-Bey, 2017). The purpose of this chapter is to outline the political, economic, educational, demographic and labour market landscapes that are shaping the context within which government policies are formulated and changed, including policies with a focus on youth. Identifying and exploring this multi-faceted background helps to illuminate the rationales underpinning policy decisions and the shifting challenges they are designed to address. It will also help to identify themes for exploration in the empirical study and literature review.

With specific regard to the development of youth policy, this discussion questions which factors have been influential, which issues have necessitated a focus on young nationals, and which efforts have improved the labour market and education sectors. Despite the large size of the UAE's youth population, this focus in UAE policymaking is relatively recent and arguably began in 2016 when the post of youth minister was created, soon followed in 2018, when the FYA was established. Prior to 2016, the youth segment did not have a dedicated policy-making body, and instead fell under the general remit of the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

This thesis explores the factors that are more or less influential on young people's choices around education and employment, their perceptions about the opportunities available to them, and the role of government policy in creating and supporting these. The unique relationship between rulers and citizens in the Gulf region is often cited as the "social contract", which ensures legitimacy and stability of Gulf states based on loyalty and a reward relationship (Jones, 2017). As discussed in chapter 1, this might have had an impact on young people's mentalities and the choices they make as a result. Accordingly, my research hypothesises that the UAE's political, economic, and social structures may have instilled a certain mindset in Emiratis that is worth unpacking. The FYA has introduced many policies and programmes dedicated to engaging and including youth in policymaking (e.g., youth circles

and councils; Federal Youth Authority, 2024). This research aimed to investigate those claims about instilling a certain mindset through qualitative methods (discussed in-depth Chapter 4).

This chapter is divided into three main sections. It begins with a discussion of the UAE's political, economic, and educational landscape, including how the discovery of oil influenced economic growth and resulted in overreliance on foreign labour. The chapter then provides an account of the government's efforts to reduce fragmentation in the labour market as well as demographic imbalances through NAFIS, the most recent nationalisation campaign launched. The third section presents the efforts made by the UAE on behalf of its youth through FYA policies and programmes (discussed in-depth in Chapter 5).

2.1 The UAE's politics, economy, and education

2.1.1 Policymaking approach

When Great Britain announced its intention to withdraw from the Gulf in 1968, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father of the UAE, who was ruling Abu Dhabi at the time, took the initiative with Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai, and invited nine Emirates, including Qatar and Bahrain, to form a union to protect their lands from external threats. Eight out of the nine states joined the federation in 1971. These were Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Fujairah, Bahrain, and Qatar. A few months later, the Emirate Ras Al Khaimah joined, while Qatar and Bahrain withdrew their membership to become independent states, leaving a total of seven UAE members. The federal monarchy has sustained the same governance model since then. The Supreme Council of the seven Emirates elects the president and vice president every five years. That said, it has informally been known and agreed upon that the Al Nahyan ruler of Abu Dhabi would be the UAE's President and that Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai, would be the UAE's Vice President¹⁴ (Antwi-Boateng & Binhuwaidin, 2017). These two Emirates are the wealthiest and most densely populated (70 per cent of the total UAE population; Spranza, 2016).

The constitutional federation has the highest political power, allowing each Emirate considerable autonomy and independence to manage Emirate-related matters. Each Emirate ruler has the right to

¹⁴ The UAE's Vice President is also the Prime Minister

develop laws, policies, and reforms (UAE Government, 2020a). The seven Emirates follow the same hereditary monarchy system as the federal monarchy. The UAE relies heavily on a clientelistic structure, similar to other GCC states, where power is distributed unevenly between rulers and citizens. By this, I mean a pre-existing informal contract between the rulers and citizens allowing the government almost full autonomy on politics and economics, distribution of wealth and public funds, in return to loyalty and patronage relationship. This is also referred to as the ruling bargain where the state maintains full autonomy on political and economic matters in exchange for providing a leisurely life for the citizens (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011). Thompson and Quilliam (2018) help explain how the UAE's political system operates:

[I]n many ways, both insidious and obvious, tribal politics has both manipulated and is manipulated by the existing power structures. Political leaders have been able to draw upon tribal support to pursue their interests and have done so by perpetuating patronage, favor, and largesse. By doing so, they have ensured that key tribes, which are instrumental to stability, remain loyal and wedded to the political system. However, the patronage system has also constrained the states' margin for maneuver in developing effective institutions based on merit, performance, and delivery. (p. 126)

Informal communication tools are as important as constitutional arrangements, given the tribal culture. The *Majlis*, for instance, is a forum that the president hosts regularly for citizens to attend, discuss personal matters and seek the President's support (Okoth, 2015; Majok, 2016; Young, 2014)¹⁵. Similarly, Daleure (2016) discussed how the tribal institutions helped the stability of the monarchy, with aspects of inclusion and communication between the leaders and citizens along with wealth distribution resulting in a smooth transition from the independent Emirates into the UAE. The available channels of communication are supposed to offer all citizens, young nationals included, direct access to the decision-makers via formal and informal platforms. For example, the FYA offers different platforms for youth to engage and communicate. Through the methods employed, this research can help to evaluate the effectiveness of those channels from the perspectives of young people.

¹⁵ The *Majlis* is an informal gathering which exemplifies the traditional gathering forum in the Gulf and helps to support the monarchy and its stability, as well as ensure successful state-building.

The founding President, Sheikh Zayed, established the Federal National Council (FNC) to allow nationals a seat and voice in setting the policy agenda. The FNC is the consultative council and parliamentary body of the UAE established per the constitution formed in 1971. Initially, the FNC was designed so that the seven rulers select 40 members to represent the citizens of each Emirate (UAE Government, 2021c), with each Emirate getting a specific number of seats based on its geographic and population size. However, in 2006, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the late President of the UAE, reformed the FNC to follow a more democratic approach by instituting an electoral college system. The reformation aimed to allow citizens to elect their representatives for half of the FNC's seats, with the remaining half continuing to be appointed by the seven rulers.

According to Article 68 of the UAE Constitution, the FNC shall have 40 members. The number of seats assigned to each Emirate is proportionate to its population, as follows:

- Abu Dhabi - 8 seats
- Dubai - 8 seats
- Sharjah - 6 seats
- Ajman - 4 seats
- Umm Al Quwain - 4 seats
- Ras Al Khaimah - 6 seats
- Fujairah - 4 seats¹⁶

In 2006, Emirati women occupied 22.2 per cent of the FNC, making it one of the highest rates of women's representation in a country's parliament globally according to the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook 2020 (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC. (n.d.)). The late UAE's President issued a directive in 2018 mandating that 50 per cent of FNC seats are allocated to women in the next parliament elections, which has been fulfilled in 2019. FNC plays a critical role in setting the policy agenda and advocating for policy changes in the UAE, including public policy.

Public policy, in one of its most basic definitions, is "a course of government action (or inaction) taken in response to social problems" (Okoth, 2015, p. 265). The government reacts to events

¹⁶ Source: <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/the-federal-national-council->

that could threaten the country’s stability, serve its public interest, enhance the social welfare system, ensure fair opportunities for everyone, and enhance efficiency (Okoth, 2015). As with all countries, the process of developing public policies in the UAE is complicated. The UAE, for example, has multiple entities with varying roles and levels of power to influence policy choices. As mentioned above, government in the UAE is structured on two levels, federal and local, with extensive autonomy given to each of the seven Emirates.

The policy process begins with public agenda setting, which is introduced by the local *Majlis* of each Ruler’s Court, the FNC, or media channels. Then, policy formulation occurs either through the legislative process of the Cabinet, the Executive Council, and the Supreme Council or, in some cases, only requires a presidential decree. Figure 1 (below) illustrates the process of public policy development at the federal level in the UAE¹⁷.

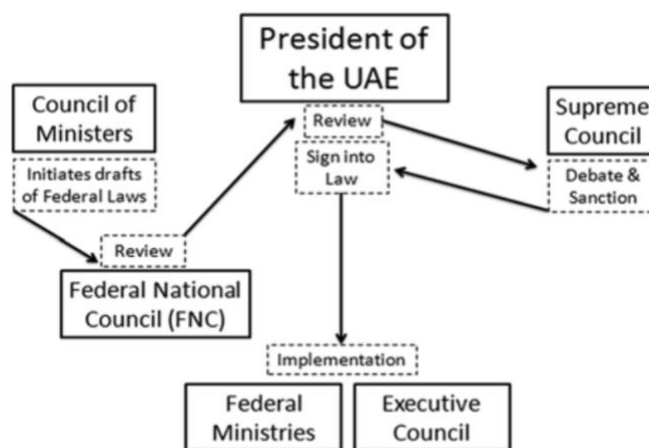


Figure 1: UAE policymaking process at the federal level

Okoth (2015) shares an example of a recommendation from the FNC to invest more in youth drug control, which was then discussed in the Ministers’ cabinet and developed into a proposal that was presented to the Supreme Council. Not all recommendations from the FNC make it to the Cabinet of Ministers. There first has to be a scrutiny process by the Secretariat of the Cabinet, which prepares the

¹⁷ Figure 1 source: Okoth, S. H. (2015). Public policymaking Process in the United Arab Emirates. In A. R. Dawoody (Ed.), *Public Administration and Policy in the Middle East* (pp. 263–280). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-1553-8_15

agenda for the Council's meetings. If a law is to be sanctioned, it must first go through the Supreme Council, but only after the Secretariat of the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs (MoCA) reviews and approves it for presentation. However, not all rules and policies are announced through Presidential Decrees, as some are declared as Cabinet decisions. Others are announced as Presidential Decrees without the rounds of consultation with the FNC or Cabinet. An example would be the designation of new UAE ambassadors. Through the key informant interviews with policymakers and practitioners, my research explores how policymaking in relation to young people is undertaken.

According to the UAE Government's official website, a set of policymaking processes is designed for all ministries and federal entities to follow. It includes gauging relevant stakeholders' interests, setting the agenda, formulating the policy, deciding on a final approach, creating an implementation plan, and developing an evaluation tool (UAE MoCA, n.d.). Despite the detailed process in the Policy Manual shared on the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs website, UAE policymaking remains complicated as it is interdependent and co-implemented in practice with the federal and local Emirates system. In addition, there are many stakeholders involved (Alghalban, 2017). The empirical study in this thesis uses discussions with key informants for youth policies to explore how this process is utilised. This aims to deepen understandings of how policies are developed, introduced, implemented, and governed to achieve results.

This section has provided an overview of policymaking in the UAE. The next section discusses the country's economic landscape (i.e., oil, visions, and implications).

2.1.2 Economic landscape

Oil has played a pivotal role in the UAE's economic growth. Its presence has determined many of the country's policies, especially in relation to the development of the labour market. Prior to oil, the country's economy depended mainly on fishing, pearl diving, trade, agriculture, herding, and craft industries (Kolb, 2015). The economy has grown exponentially since oil was discovered in 1958 resulting in high demand for foreign labour in the oil industry and beyond (Plecher, 2021). According to the World Bank, the UAE had a 36,000 US dollars GDP per capita in 2020, making it the third richest state in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The UAE's growth has been attributed to

oil for an extended period, but there have been noticeable efforts in recent years to diversify income sources. The focus has been shifting towards growing sectors such as aviation, logistics, space, and tourism; improving the physical infrastructure; and creating a robust digital economy and a greener, more sustainable economy. Investment has come from domestic sources as well as from Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). This has attracted top global companies and improved the business ecosystem (Ahmed & Alfaki, 2017). Moreover, in 2022, the UAE's non-oil sector accounted for 70% of the total GDP (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Finance, 2022).¹⁸

The UAE's diversification goals have resulted in even higher demand for foreign labour in sectors that include manufacturing, construction, and tourism (Antwi-Boateng & Binhuwaidin, 2017; Seric & Tong, 2019; Callen et al., 2014). Along with some of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, the country has continued to develop national human capital, increase highly productive and tradable sectors, and attract highly skilled workers. The UAE has also dedicated further investments in general and vocational education, science, technology and research development (Antwi-Boateng & Binhuwaidin, 2017; Seric & Tong, 2019).

The UAE focused its 2021 Vision on becoming one of the "best countries" globally, via supporting a competitive knowledge economy, sustainable environment and infrastructure, world-class healthcare, a first-rate education system, public safety, a fair judiciary, a cohesive society, and a preserved identity (UAE Cabinet, 2024; UAE Cabinet, 2023a)¹⁹. The vision had four main objectives: to ensure Emirati nationals can contribute effectively to the socio-economic growth of the country and sustain it; to ensure strong union among the Emirates; to develop a knowledge-based economy; and to ensure the prosperity of Emiratis²⁰.

To explore the aspiration of building a knowledge economy, it is first essential to define and explain the term. Peter Drucker first coined the term *knowledge economy* in his book *The Age of Discontinuity*, describing it as using knowledge from any field to support economic growth (1969). He concluded that,

¹⁸ While there are differences between each Emirate's economic growth, the research looks at the UAE's economic growth overall. To explain, Dubai could be seen as more advanced given that its economic model has been focused on diversification long before the other Emirates or Gulf states.

¹⁹ The definition of *best country* is vague and relative. Thus, no clear conclusion can be reached in understanding how the country aims to be the 'best country' in the world.

²⁰ The 2021 Vision documents were not that clear on the mechanisms and pathways followed to achieve the goals, making it hard to track results.

in the 20th Century, the economy would be based on knowledge and information, not capital and natural resources. In other words, the intellectual capacity of the workforce would matter more than its physical capacity. Complementing Drucker's work, theorists such as Bell (1974), Castells (1996), and Stehr (1994) emphasised that knowledge is the most valuable commodity to sustain growth in developed economies, specifically in the post-industrial era, and that this is why countries must invest in education and human capital development. Drucker (1993) also illustrated the role of knowledge and innovation in improving competitive advantage (Nonaka et al., 1995; Brown et al., 2001).

Advancements in knowledge and capabilities require a strong education system and skilled human capital to deliver on policy goals. In the UAE, it is important to understand how reliant the knowledge economy has been on foreign labour and what the implications of this are. As Chen and Dahlman (2006) explain:

[The] Knowledge Economy typically involves elements such as long-term investments in education, developing innovation capability, modernising the information infrastructure, and having an economic environment conducive to market transactions. The World Bank has termed these elements the pillars of the Knowledge Economy, and together they constitute the Knowledge Economy framework. (p. 4)

Many countries have invested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), artificial intelligence (AI), and new sectors as they try to develop more knowledge intensive sectors. The UAE has also introduced different policies and programmes designed to develop its human capital. The UAE's charter in 2021, in celebration of its 50th anniversary, states as one of its key principles that "the main future driver for growth is human capital" (UAE Government, 2021d). The *Principles of the 50* charter continues that "[d]eveloping the educational system, recruiting talent, retaining specialists and continuously building skills will be key to ensuring the Emirates remain the most competitive national economy" (UAE Government, 2021d).

Driving human capital growth involves developing the capabilities of Emiratis as well as non-Emiratis who can contribute to the country's labour force and its economic development. One example here is how the UAE's space sector employed only nationals for its Mars mission. Soliman (2021)

reports that, “more than 200 Emirati engineers—34% of them are women—designed and built the Hope Probe at the University of Colorado’s Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics and the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center in Dubai” (para. 4). Here, the UAE has succeeded in the development of Emiratis in a new sector such as space, with the initiative “designed as a catalyst for a new generation of Arab scientists and engineers, and as an anchor project for the growing science and space sectors” (UAE Cabinet, 2023b, para. 10). The Mars mission is the first interplanetary mission in the Arab world that arrived successfully at the Red Planet and comprised a full Emirati team (The National, 2021b; Chang, 2021).

Despite successes such as those in the space sector, the UAE’s economic growth still seems to be heavily driven by revenues from its diversification efforts rather than from a knowledge-based economy per se (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC., (2024). Specifically, it is unclear how innovative sectors such as space, advanced manufacturing, and trading sectors that require highly educated and knowledgeable workforces are contributing actively to economic growth. Oil’s contribution is still relatively high, as it represented 30 per cent of the UAE’s income in 2022, providing a level of economic stability and resources for the government and allowing it to make economic choices and investments to diversify (United States International Trade Administration [ITA], 2022; Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC., 2024).

Following on from the 2021 UAE vision statement, the UAE announced its Centennial 2071 vision to be the *best country* in the world (UAE Cabinet, 2023c, para. 2). The plan was built on four pillars: a future-focused government, excellent education, a diversified knowledge economy, and a happy and cohesive society. This plan, because of its reliance on a knowledge-based economy, requires the development of talented human capital. Early theories of knowledge economy explain the importance of endogenous growth (Švarc & Dabić, 2017; Maitra, 2016). Endogenous growth theory sees economic growth as primarily coming from inside, rather than outside a state. These internal, or endogenous, sources are themselves seen as feeding into productivity improvements, which in turn support more innovation and investment in human capital. My research focuses on the endogenous source of young Emiratis who represent an underutilised human resource, important for demographic reasons, and having potential for more productive labour market and economic growth. Laroche argues that “human

capital induces growth by stimulating technological advancement or by enhancing labour productivity” (Laroche et al., 1999, p. 88).

The current workforce division in the UAE indicates that economic growth is led by expatriate labourers, who are an exogenous, or external, source, which represents 89 per cent of the population and 92 per cent of the total workforce (Pricewaterhouse Coopers [PwC], 2023). Table 1 below presents the workforce distribution in 2019 by gender and sector. Emiratis occupy almost 80 per cent of federal and local government jobs, and this does not include data from military employment—all Emiratis. In contrast, the private sector and entrepreneurship, which play critical roles in supporting the UAE’s economic growth and the creative sectors, are highly dominated by non-Emiratis. However, the share of knowledge workers in 2021 was 49.15 per cent, without providing details on the type of employment or their nationalities (UAE Government, 2020c). The data show that females make a higher percentage than males in local government while males exceed the total percentage of females in the federal government. However, the data do not include security sectors such as the military, which is assumed to be highly male dominated. Thus, the recorded labour participation for Emirati females and males in the public sector should be taken with caution. In the private sector, the data show that non-national males make up the majority of the sector. In this thesis, I further explore young national females’ and males’ perceptions of the sectors and preferences to understand what guides their choices: are there any trends emerging as a result of the NAFIS campaign?

Table 1: UAE workforce distribution by sex and sector in 2019

Source: <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/jobs/uae-workforce>²¹

Sector	Emiratis			Non-Emiratis			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Federal Government	44.7%	31.0%	40.5%	2.0%	1.6%	1.9%	3.9%	3.4%	3.8%
Local government	36.7%	40.0%	37.7%	5.2%	3.7%	4.9%	6.6%	6.0%	6.5%
Private Sector	6.5%	11.4%	8.0%	82.4%	46.4%	73.9%	79.1%	44.3%	70.7%
Shared	10.0%	16.0%	11.9%	4.4%	3.7%	4.2%	4.6%	4.5%	4.6%
Foreign	0.2%	0.6%	0.3%	1.1%	1.4%	1.1%	1.0%	1.3%	1.1%
Diplomatic Authority	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Non-profit Organisations	0.9%	0.5%	0.8%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Without Establishment	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Private Household	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	4.3%	42.8%	13.4%	4.1%	40.1%	12.7%
Other	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Not Stated	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The UAE envisions a real change in its economic landscape that enables growing its human capital through skills development, innovation, knowledge, productivity, capabilities building, and attitudes favourable to the private sector. It is important to note that my research does not suggest that building a knowledge economy should be dependent on Emiratis only, especially as Emiratis make up only 11 per cent of the total population. Rather, this research aims to understand how young nationals' skills and capabilities are developed to support sustainable economic growth of the country through the relevant entities (e.g. FYA, Ministry of Education, NAFIS, and Ministry of Human Resources and *Emiratisation*; all of which are discussed later in the chapter). This current section has discussed the labour market landscape in the UAE. The next section presents an overview on the educational changes and reforms.

2.1.3 Educational landscape

Education is one area of public policy that could help build human capital. As Romer (1990) argues, higher investment in education might not directly result in economic progress, but it is an essential variable, nevertheless. He adds to Schumpeter's argument that production growth is based on the scientific talent of human capital focused on research and development—more educated people and

²¹ The information has been removed since retrieval

scientists can correlate with overall growth. By exploring the design of Emirati youth policies and young nationals' educational and occupational choices, this research aims to understand whether the current changes in youth policy are impacting young people's decisions.

Education plays a critical role in developing the knowledge and capabilities of youth (OECD, 2015). The UAE's literacy rates have increased rapidly in recent years. In 1975, the adult literacy rate was 54 per cent for men and 31 per cent for women. Today's literacy rate is approximately 95 per cent for both sexes (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC. (2020). In terms of constitutional rights, education is free and compulsory for every citizen until they complete Grade 12 or reach the age of 18 (UAE Government, 2023e). Initially, Egyptian and Kuwaiti curricula highly influenced the UAE's public education system, since Egypt and Kuwait, along with Jordan, were among the most developed educationally in the MENA region (AlMoaibed, 2018). Public schools, from junior to senior levels, are gender segregated and Arabic is the first language taught, while English is the second language taught with science subjects (Oxford Business Group, 2020).

The UAE has invested heavily in the education system aiming for its improvement. In 2018, for instance, AED 10.4 billion were allocated from the federal budget to the education sector (UAE Government, 2024). According to the UAE's Ministry of Finance, 14.8 per cent of the total federal budget was allocated to education in 2020. This is an increase of 1.46 per cent from 2016. More recently, in 2022, 16.3 per cent of the federal budget was allocated to education (Nagraj, 2022).

Furthermore, education has recently been a key focus of national strategy documents, including, as previously mentioned, as one of the National Agenda goals under Vision 2021²². Elaborating on the discussion in the Introduction, several efforts were made to support the education system. For example, the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 emphasises the importance of providing the required technical and practical skills to develop the economy and equip Emiratis with the knowledge necessary for the economic and entrepreneurship sectors²³. In its Strategic Plan 2017–2021, the Ministry of

²² The vision had four main objectives: to ensure Emirati nationals can contribute effectively to the socio-economic growth of the country and sustain it, to ensure strong union among the Emirates, to develop a knowledge-based economy, and to ensure the prosperity of Emiratis.

²³ My research did not examine all government strategies.

Education stated its vision of creating an inclusive education system to create a creative and innovative culture (UAE Government, 2021e).

Reforms under the Ministry of Education have recently aimed to improve the country's OECD ranking and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores as well as raise the upper-secondary graduation rate to 98 per cent (Kamal, 2018). Recent developments have included the introduction of a new system of licensing for all teachers in private and public schools, changes in the public sector curricula, and changes in the tracks systems²⁴. Despite the considerable changes in the UAE's education system, students still do not meet international performance standards. For example, the OECD PISA results in 2019 revealed that, of 79 countries, the UAE fell from 47th to 50th place in mathematics, improved by two places in reading to 46th place, and fell in science from 46th to 49th place (Sanderson, 2019a). These results indicate that there could be other challenges within the education system that are affecting its quality, teachers' capabilities, and curriculum outcomes.

In terms of higher education, Emiratis are guaranteed a place in public universities if they meet the admission requirements. Noted in a report published by Strategy& (2023), "the UAE has a high graduation rate from upper secondary education of 98 per cent, higher than the global average of 80 per cent" (p. 5). There are also private universities in the UAE in which Emiratis can enroll, with studies being sponsored by the government based on certain criteria as well as the university's ranking. An example here would be New York University (NYU) in Abu Dhabi, where the UAE President offers full sponsorship to any student who is granted admission, regardless of nationality. Some employers offer sponsorship based on their needs for majors and fields in private universities in the UAE or abroad. Also, some local rulers offer scholarships for citizens from the same Emirate. Lastly, some government entities offer sponsorship for Emiratis with excellent results in high school as long as they are willing to study in-demand majors. Also, the Ministry of Education offers scholarships to Emiratis who qualify and want to pursue their education abroad (Kamal, 2018). In addition, the UAE enables access to a considerable number of top international universities for those who prefer not to study abroad, including

²⁴ Initially, public schools had two tracks: science and math but were recently replaced with general and advanced tracks (UAE Government, 2024). The advanced tracks, and those who qualify for them, are expected to transition into universities without going through the foundation year.

Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, INSEAD, University of Birmingham, University of Wollongong, and IIT Delhi-Abu Dhabi, among others.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is one of the key priorities of the UAE. The government has created the National Qualifications Authority, which is responsible for improving and maintaining a framework for national qualifications and ensuring a quality level of TVET. Other institutions at a local Emirate level oversee the TVET sector (UAE Government, 2021f). Furthermore, on the kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) system for ages 4 to 17, Emiratis interested in pursuing TVET can choose to switch to a technical secondary school at the intermediate level/Cycle 2 stage of education (between the ages of 10 and 13/14 years). Those who choose the TVET track can achieve a Technical Secondary Diploma. The UAE Government website states “the UAE needs to produce 10 Emiratis with vocational skills for every university graduate produced to achieve sustainable and diversified knowledge-based economy” (UAE Government, 2021f). Upon high-school graduation, young people can choose between the different TVET institutions, such as Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) Technical Academy, Petroleum Institute, Emirates Aviation University, Emirates Institute for Banking and Finance, and Higher Colleges of Technology, among others (UAE Government, 2021f).

Since education is at the top of the UAE Government’s priorities and could support labour market development and economic growth (UAE Government, 2023e; UAE Government 2023a), it is vital for policymakers to understand how young nationals view their education choices and the rationale behind their decisions. Providing top education opportunities, whether K–12 or higher education, is important to support the country’s growth goals. The focus groups conducted with young people in this thesis aimed to generate an understanding of how young Emiratis perceive those opportunities, and how their personal perceptions influence their choices. It explores whether, by guaranteeing Emiratis free public education and employment, attaining a degree is seen as more of an advantage to secure a high-paying job in the extensive and privileged (for national citizens) public sector, and how this might affect individuals’ motivation to choose more difficult or demanding academic and career options.

While government goals are aspirational, with rhetorical promises and strong communication messages, tracking outcomes is not possible. It is unclear, for example, how Emirati youth contributed to achieving Vision 2021 or are expected to play a role in the country's development. Government leaders continue to emphasise the importance of having young nationals support the UAE's growth (UAE Cabinet, 2023a, UAE Government, 2023d). Yet, evidence showing the effects of policies in this area was not publicly available at the time of my research. The UAE, through its policies and programmes, is charting a new economic vision, one where the private sector and entrepreneurship play a more active role as career options for young Emiratis. The next section discusses the demographic imbalance and the current challenges in the labour market linked to the discovery of oil and the UAE's development over the years. It further presents the UAE Government's efforts to address the structural challenges.

2.2 Demographic imbalance and changes in the labour market

The discovery of oil has resulted in a sharp rise in employment of foreign labour, as attracting expatriates has been viewed as a quick solution to bridge the skills gap in the local population (Malit Jr & Al Youha, 2021). This approach has offered a shortcut towards accelerated growth, but has created other challenges. For instance, there are concerns about the country's security and stability given that the labour market, with the exception of the public sector, is dominated by foreign labour (see Table 1). POMEPS' study in 2019 shows the ratio of non-citizens to citizens to be eight to one in the UAE and that Emiratis are unwilling, particularly, to take up manually demanding jobs. Foreign workers can be found in both highly skilled (e.g., consultants, experts, and researchers) and low-skilled jobs (e.g., drivers, cleaners, and handymen; POMEPS, 2019). Based on that, this research assumes that labour market imbalances are partly inevitable because of labour shortages since the population of nationals is only 11 per cent of the total and it is partly cultural because Emiratis are mostly interested in public sector jobs.

This labour division is also a common challenge for neighbouring Gulf countries (e.g., Qatar and Saudi Arabia), possibly because of the existing *social contract* between citizens and the rulers (Daleure,

2016; Jones, 2017; Hertog, 2012)²⁵. My research argues that Emirati youth have a role to play in supporting the economic growth of the country; it is therefore important to evaluate government efforts towards guiding young people to develop the education and skills necessary for participation in the knowledge economy. In 2020, the government appointed a Minister of State for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), who is also in charge of attracting investments and retaining global talent (Saleh & Nashar, 2022). The government initiative to lure away and retain talent from other countries could further enlarge the gap between locals and non-locals, more so if Emiratis today are both saturated in the public sector and lack the capabilities, education, and skills needed to support the knowledge economy. Specifically, there may be a tension between the government's efforts to attract foreign workers and its efforts to encourage Emiratis into a wider range of sectors and job types.

Another layer of complexity is the UAE's announcement of a new citizenship law, which is designed to accelerate the country's transition to a knowledge economy through attracting foreign talent. This could also impact the perception of Emiratis and their employment preferences for public sector jobs as a safer and less competitive option (Turak, 2021; Alshaali, 2018; Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011). The other possible path to employment, although less secure, is entrepreneurship, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) making up 98 per cent of all businesses in the UAE and providing 52 per cent of jobs in 2019 (Alafeefi, 2019).

To address workforce imbalances, the UAE imposed an *Emiratisation* policy in 2005. The *Emiratisation* (*Tawteen* in Arabic) policy aimed to promote the private sector as an alternative career choice for Emiratis to address their over-recruitment in the public sector, which is both expensive in terms of resourcing and inefficient due to low productivity²⁶. The policy imposed a nationalisation quota on private sector employers ranging between one per cent to three per cent depending on the sector (Hertog, 2012; Charles, 2015). Since then, the government has also introduced other policies to try to increase the private sector's appeal for Emiratis, including adjustments to balance benefits and expectations in both sectors (e.g., the overall package, pay, working hours, responsibilities, and

²⁵ The concept of the social contract is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3

²⁶ The Emiratisation initiative is a nationalisation strategy through which gulf countries, not only the UAE, force a quota system on private sector employers to hire local citizens.

providing better job security for Emiratis in the private sector; Gulf News, 2019)²⁷. However, despite the government's efforts over a decade, in 2021, only 3.72 per cent of locals worked in the private sector, which represents a drop from 8 per cent in 2019 (Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center, 2024b²⁸; The Economist, 2021; Sarker & Rahman, 2020). In comparison, according to figures released by the UAE Central Bank, the private sector accounts for 81.5 per cent of all employment in the UAE and is vital to its economic growth (Rebei, 2020).

My research used a qualitative approach to explore how Emirati youth perceive their opportunities, the reasons behind their choices, and their motivations as they plan their careers, investigating whether, and how, social and cultural realities could affect young people's decision-making. Until recently, government jobs were viewed as the most sought after by nationals, making it even more challenging for private-sector employers to attract Emirati job seekers. This continues to create significant obstacles to meeting the imposed government quotas on the private sector as they try to attract nationals, bridge the skills and capabilities gap, and offer good financial packages (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011)²⁹. To fill the skills' gap, some private-sector employers introduced a track for nationals that take entry-level Emiratis through a 12–18-month training programme focused on developing their skills and competencies to match employers' needs (Emirates NBD, 2019). However, and with all the aforementioned efforts, the results of *Emiratisation* have not fulfilled the government's aims, as evidenced by the available data.

In 2021, as part of the UAE's Projects of the 50³⁰, the government introduced NAFIS as a new initiative aiming to reduce Emirati youth and wider adult unemployment as well as promote private-sector jobs. The NAFIS initiative aims “to increase Emirati competitiveness and empower them to occupy jobs in the private sector in the next five years” (NAFIS, 2022)³¹. It focuses on offering job opportunities for UAE nationals in the private sector, supporting them financially and building their

²⁷ Exact figures are not publicly available for comparison between the sectors. Also, NAFIS addresses the differences between the sectors to bridge the gap in pay and benefits for Emiratis

²⁸ The page initially showed Emiratis versus non-Emiratis. This has been changed since the data was retrieved

²⁹ hiring Emiratis is considered more expensive than non-Emiratis

³⁰ The 'Projects of the 50' is a series of developmental and economic projects which aim to accelerate the UAE's development and transform it into a comprehensive hub in all sectors and establish its status as an ideal destination for talent and investors. 'Projects of the 50' covers several key sectors such as the economy, entrepreneurship, advanced skills, digital economy, space and advanced technologies (UAE Government, 2021a, para. 1).

³¹ The term *NAFIS* in Arabic translates to “compete” in English.

skills and capabilities. The initiative includes 13 policies and programmes to incentivise Emiratis to join the private sector. It also works with the private sector to incentivise employers to hire more Emiratis by imposing quotas and providing subsidies along with other benefits to encourage them to join the private sector or entrepreneurship. The programmes listed in Table 2 (below) aspire to develop the capabilities and competitiveness of young Emiratis. NAFIS aims to employ 75,000 Emiratis in the private sector by 2026.

Table 2: NAFIS programmes³²

Programme	Description
NAFIS Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council	The Council brings together representatives across the federal government. It is tasked with strengthening private-sector partnerships and implementing projects to provide 75,000 private-sector jobs for Emiratis.
NAFIS Emirati Salary Support Scheme	A grant contributes to the recruitment and training costs of Emirati graduates in the private sector, with a monthly top-up of up to AED 5,000 for five years after recruitment. Top-ups are conditional and based on a range of defined target salaries.
NAFIS Merit Programme	A fixed monthly salary top-up of AED 5,000 to be provided for five years to Emirati workers in specialised fields, including nurses, accountants and financial auditors, lawyers, financial analysts and coders.
NAFIS Pension Programme	A five-year subsidy against the pension plan contributions of Emirati staff earning less than AED 20,000 per month and a government-paid contribution on behalf of the company against the cost of pension plans for Emirati staff in the first five years, which ensures zero contribution to the cost of Emiratis pensions in the first year of private sector employment
NAFIS Child Allowance Scheme	A government child allowance payment will be paid to Emirati staff working in the private sector of up to AED 800 per child up to a maximum of AED 3,200 per month to help with the costs of childcare up to the age of 21.
NAFIS Talent Programme	An investment of AED 1.25 billion in developing specialised vocational skills for Emiratis, with internationally recognised certifications in property management, accounting, business management and technology skills.
NAFIS Apprentice Programme	A train-to-hire initiative to build vocational training for Emiratis in private and semi-private companies with a range of financial awards across a number of business sectors.
NAFIS Recruitment Programme	Beginning with a base of 2% Emiratis in knowledge worker and skilled roles in private sector companies in the UAE, a rising scale across five years to reach a target of 10% Emirati employees after five years.
NAFIS National Healthcare Programme	An educational grant programme targeting the development of 10,000 Emirati healthcare workers within the coming five years, rolling out a Graduate Healthcare Assistant Programme, a Higher Diploma in Emergency Medicine and a bachelor's degree in nursing. Supported and led by Fatima College of Health Sciences and ACTVET.

³²There is no clarity on the institutionalisation and implementation mechanisms for each and this has not been covered in this research. Recreated from source: <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/uae-in-the-future/initiatives-of-the-next-50/projects-of-the-50/second-set-of-projects-of-the-50>.

NAFIS Unemployment Benefit	An unemployment benefit to be paid to Emiratis working in the private sector who lose their jobs due to circumstances beyond their control, giving them a six-month period to find another position.
NAFIS Start-up Break	Beginning 2022, a subsidised career break for Emiratis in Federal Government positions to start a business of between 6–12 months, covering 50% of the employee’s salary.
NAFIS Early Retirement	An opportunity for Emiratis in Federal Government positions to take early retirement in order to explore business opportunities and start a new private sector business with financing of five years’ salary payments or a lump sum golden handshake payment.
NAFIS Graduate Fund	AED of one billion fund to provide microloans for university students and fresh graduates to support their business projects, in collaboration with UAE universities.

The government dedicated serious efforts to promote the private sector through NAFIS initiative and different government officials’ statements (i.e., the President and Vice President of the UAE) on multiple occasions aiming to encourage and increase the participation of Emiratis in the private sector (Al Amir, 2023). NAFIS is currently limited to a five-year programme. It is still unclear what happens next or when government support for the private sector would cease for both private sector employers and young nationals. There is also a lack of clarity related to how the governance mechanisms will work to sustain results. Specifically, similar previous nationalisation efforts across the GCC encouraged the private sector to ghost employ and could result in administrative corruption³³ (Hertog, 2012).

The empirical study conducted in this research (see Chapter 4) involved engaging with young people to understand their views on the NAFIS initiative and how this might help illuminate their perceptions of the FYA policies and programmes introduced in the next section of this chapter. The rationale underpinning the introduction of NAFIS into the discussion is the fact that it is a government initiative that could be influencing young nationals’ choices of employment (see Chapter 6). The key informant interviews with policy actors explored their views about NAFIS, the policymaking approach, and the programme design (see Chapter 7). NAFIS offers this research an opportunity to discuss and understand the perceptions of young Emiratis regarding the initiative and its effectiveness in changing

³³ Ghost employment refers to employing someone and adding them to the payroll without them actually being actively employed in the company. Recently, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation has warned against it and companies will be fined and referred to the Public Prosecution. Link: <https://www.agbi.com/analysis/employment/2022/10/uae-warns-against-hiring-ghost-emiratis-to-meet-quota-targets/>

their career choices. In the next section, I discuss the specific designated government policies and programmes for youth under the FYA.

2.3 A focus on Emirati youth

Despite the government's efforts, little is known about how the different policies and programmes have influenced the mindsets, motivations, and behaviours of young Emiratis. The social contract (discussed in the previous sections and again in Chapter 3) between the UAE Government and Emiratis, including the youth, is well-established. The application of the rentier state theory to contextualise the social contract aims to better unpack the complexity of this relationship. In many ways, the social contract influences how the government engages with Emirati youth. Specifically, the decades-old implied understanding that the government shall continue to support Emiratis through the provision of jobs and a generous welfare programme makes it challenging for the government to completely change its approach. Any policy change or reform has to be carefully considered so as to not undermine the social contract, particularly in terms of the distribution of wealth, and as a result the government's standing with its citizens, in ways that could destabilise the country's political and ruling system. This is key, given that the distribution of wealth, which includes benefits such as education, employment, and healthcare, is the most important factor supporting the monarchy's stability (Roberts, 2021; Tok, 2020). Providing such benefits has traditionally enabled the government to practice political and economic autonomy with limited involvement from its citizens (Zicchieri, 2016).

Young Emiratis may be expecting the same advantages and privileges from the government as their parents had, which could result in instilling an entitlement mindset accustomed to comprehensive government support. Even with youth strategies that have recently been introduced, there has not been a significant, visible change in the attitude and behaviours of young Emiratis towards their career choices, evident by the labour market division and given the perceived need for the recent NAFIS initiative (NAFIS, 2022). The total percentage of Emiratis in the private sector, as mentioned earlier, has dropped rather than increased prior to the launch of *NAFIS* (UAE Vision, 2021; Duncan, 2019)³⁴.

³⁴ Changes in the percentage of Emiratis in the private sector might have been different when the NAFIS programme was launched early in 2021. This research does not include *NAFIS* results as the *NAFIS* initiative is still considered new, and it is too soon to assess its effectiveness since it ends in 2026.

This thesis seeks to explore how the challenges in shifting Emiratis to the private sector may be rooted in other factors, such as cultural and social aspects. As Matsumoto (2019) states, “factoring in this cultural habit while reviewing the relationship between Emiratization and employment could help explain some possible ‘disincentivising factors’ for both employer and employee” (p. 8). In fact, government support may have contributed to unemployment—for example, generous privileges make it possible for most young Emirati job seekers to adopt Not Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) status and wait for a job that they like instead of “needing” to secure a job to make a living (Lim, 2018, p.2; Kropf & Ramady, 2015).

A PwC (2023) survey revealed positive attitudes among graduating Emirati students towards joining the private sector. Yet, it revealed that most Emiratis only view the private sector as temporary since,

“for Emiratis, the public sector has traditionally been the employer of choice, based on status and aligned values, along with the perception that jobs here are highly rewarding and well paid, with attractive scope for job flexibility. This strong appeal, coupled with widening skills gaps linked to private-sector opportunities, has perpetuated the trend of nationals preferring to work in the public sector” (Bin Braik, 2023, para. 6).

Another potential problem that my research explores is whether, and how, nepotism and *Wasta*, known otherwise as favouritism, might have hindered government efforts in incentivising Emiratis to join the private sector. This long-existing phenomenon may play a role in determining young Emiratis’ career choices. While nepotism works by having a family member in a senior position to get things done for you, whether it is a simple request or a big one (Mitchell & Gengler, 2019), *Wasta* can apply to both family members and friends.

Wasta is the ability to use a mediator’s power to get what you want, regardless of whether it is fair or not. *Wasta*, or favouritism, is rooted in the culture and traditions of Arab countries and collective societies such as East Asian cultures (Almoaibed, 2020; Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). For young Emiratis, this means leveraging their social capital, family connections and network of friends to seek employment in the public sector. Thus, a job can be guaranteed upon graduation for some people, while

others may have to wait longer even when they are more qualified because they lack the social capital³⁵ (Ali & Weir, 2020).

Another example of a UAE initiative for young Emiratis is the introduction of mandatory National Service for males in 2012. The decision could arguably influence educational and career choices of young male Emiratis, their skills acquisition, knowledge, and opportunities. The law targets Emiratis between 18 to 30 years old, who must go through the 11-month programme, previously ranging between 9 and 16 months. The National Service is also voluntary for females and males between the ages of 30–40. Through the National Service (hereafter, ‘the Service’), the UAE Armed Forces aims to have a positive impact geopolitically, economically, and socially (Al Tamimi, 2016). The Service is a national security policy that aims to help build strong nationhood among Emiratis, protect them from external threats during regional instability, and develop a sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, this thesis hypothesises that Service may have posed another challenge for Emirati youth adjusting to the new law and how they can plan their education and career paths in parallel, more so since the Service comes at a sensitive age for males, who have just graduated high school (Khokhar, 2016). One of the benefits that the National Service could have, is influencing young males' mentality to be more responsible and independent. However, no clarity exists on how it influences the rentier mentality or social contract among the Service recruits.

MacLean’s study of Korean War veterans showed that some who planned to continue their higher education degrees did not do so because enlistment hindered their opportunities and motivation (Lim, 2018). The Service may have advantages in instilling certain ideals and values among recruits, especially discipline and nationalism; however, some consequences must be considered in the process. It is not clear how male literacy rate in the UAE is affected by this decision as they are expected to complete the Service directly upon completion of high school. Also, the UAE Gender Balance Council’s (GBC; 2020) website states that 77% of Emirati women continue their higher education degrees in

³⁵ In some cases, the *Wasta* or the father or family's name is strong enough to accelerate someone's career progression and status in the government sector. Many get promoted because of those ties, not merit or performance. In return, this hurts overall economic growth and creates corruption and favouritism since some people get hired for the wrong reasons and may not be as competent as those who should have gotten the job. In comparison, this is not the case in the private sector, where there is no tolerance for inefficiency or low performance. The use of *Wasta* is rooted in the country's tribalism and forms the stability of the social and economic hierarchy based on the power of families (Tsai, 2016, p. 89).

secondary school while making around 70% of all university graduates. It is not clear how the mandatory service has shaped and impacted young Emirati males' aspirations to study and work upon completion of their duty (e.g., Emirati men's labour market participation rate fell to 62.9 per cent in 2017 from 64.1 per cent in 2016; Sanderson, 2019b). Such an effect on young males could create further challenges for the government to employ Emiratis in the private sector, more importantly in strategic industries, if they opt to join the armed forces as a result of the Service.

Thus far, I have identified a number of youth-related initiatives, but is there an overarching government strategy with specific goals? As stated, the UAE Government considers Emirati youth to be the main enabler to achieving its economic vision evidenced by the 2016 appointment of a Minister of State for Youth Affairs and the establishment of a government body for youth that is the Federal Youth Authority (FYA) (Al Amir, 2023). According to the World Bank (2006),

[T]he role of departments of youth is partly a function of how far countries have progressed in developing and implementing policies for the young. In many Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, where policy development has been well established over several decades, the role of youth departments is mainly policy development, coordination, and monitoring. p. 215)

According to the UAE Cabinet's website (2024), the FYA, from its establishment in 2018 until 2021, developed a National Youth Strategy focused on five areas: education, work, health and well-being, family establishment, and strong citizenship. The strategy focuses mainly on building an enabling environment for youth to grow, develop, and participate more actively in society. It also focuses on instilling Emirati values among the youth segment³⁶. This is illustrated in the national youth agenda which states that "priority 1- patriotic and value-driven youth who embody UAE identity and culture" (Federal Youth Authority, 2022, para.05). However, it does not directly or practically demonstrate a goal of developing youth capabilities and skills, which is important for a knowledge economy. This is despite launching 23 policies and programmes for young people (see Table 3), which are reviewed and

³⁶ The UAE's youth sector serves youth between 15–35 years.

assessed thoroughly in the document analysis in Chapter 5. It is worth noting that the *NAFIS* initiative, which has 13 programmes, is independent from the FYA and may demonstrate capabilities building for youth. This research, however, did not examine them thoroughly and the programmes’ mechanisms and institutions are not yet clear given how recent *NAFIS* is.

Table 3: FYA policies and programmes

<u>Policy/Programme</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Link</u>
1. 100 Mentors	Through arranging 100 sessions with 100 selected mentors from private and public sectors, FYA aims to “enhance” young Emiratis’ skills and “refine” their expertise in different fields. Each session has three main components: storytelling, chat, and a “secret recipe”. Storytelling is the segment where the selected speaker shares their journey, from obstacles to successes and challenges. By chat, FYA refers to the questions asked by the moderator to the hosted speaker. By “secret recipe”, they mean the tips and guidelines the speaker would give youth to help them succeed. The format is a stage where the selected mentor sits with the moderator, followed by questions asked by the moderator or the audience, mainly the youth segment.	https://mentors.youth.gov.ae/en
2. <i>Fakhr</i> <i>(Fakhr is an Arabic word that translates to pride)</i>	Through the celebration of the National Service recruits, where the government and Emiratis share their gratitude and appreciation for the recruits. The Forum happens on an annual base organised by the FYA. It was introduced shortly after the mandatory males’ National Service programme was launched in 2014.	https://fakhr.youth.gov.ae
3. Flow Café	FYA designed the cafe to create a social platform that provides a networking experience through organic and healthy foods.	https://www.flowdubai.com
4. Youth Data Hub	Through public- and private-sector partnerships, the initiative aims to better understand the pulse of the youth by analysing collected data to drive insights, come up with solutions, and inform policies through youth-centric data.	https://data.youth.gov.ae
5. Youth Circles	The initiative aims to gather data and recommendations through youth, crowd-source ideas, skills, and talents to find solutions for government challenges, receive feedback for policy ideas directly from youth, send direct messages to youth, engage with youth to know their aspirations and opinions on different topics that can enhance policymaking. Each circle consists of a presentation, discussion, and solution. The Circles may be requested to be hosted in public and private-sector entities	https://circles.youth.gov.ae

6. Arab Youth Center	<p>To develop initiatives and programmes to benefit the region, engage youth in discussions with decision-makers, build a better future for Arab youth, and create the first Arab youth strategy. The Forum under the Arab Youth Center is held over a three-day period.</p>	https://arabyouthcenter.org
7. Done by Youth	<p>The “Done by Youth” stamp is awarded to Emirati youth entrepreneurs. The process is done through an application for the "Done by Youth" stamp from the FYA website. Those who successfully qualify based on the criteria get the stamp with benefits. For example, marketing, access to financial support, workshops, exclusive government and corporate memberships, and events. FYA believes that through this initiative it shows pride in the efforts of youth and their achievements.</p>	https://dby.youth.gov.ae/en
8. Youth Policy	<p>By engaging with youth through different communication channels and initiatives to gather their opinions and attitudes towards the challenges they face and propose suitable and feasible solutions. Designing government policies that address youth challenges and provide solutions to their problems through FYA can assess the impact of these policies in terms of their effectiveness and usefulness to the youth sector and targeted groups.</p>	https://policy.youth.gov.ae/en
9. Emirates Youth Values National Programme	<p>Filming dialogues with senior citizens to showcase their experience, knowledge, traditions, and culture. The programme has two dimensions: public entities that promote the values and youth working with the values. Through the programme, FYA aims to teach Emirati cultural values, strengthen the role of youth in adopting, spreading, and transferring Emirati values, and create a positive image of Emiratis in different contexts. The programme aims to show the values of giving, benevolence, cooperation, and love of others through a series of representative scenes filmed with the efforts of youth, introduce Emirati values to foreigners by inviting them to their homes for a meal, and inviting youth to participate in designing a creative visual book on Emirati values.</p>	https://values.youth.gov.ae

<p>10. Youth Delegate programme to the United Nations</p>	<p>The programme allows selected Emirati youth delegates to participate in the world's largest intergovernmental organisation, which provides an opportunity for learning, building skills, and exposure. The selected Emirati youth (one male and one female annually) are expected to work on different tasks and projects assigned to them through the programme model. The two individuals between the ages of 20 and 26 get to attend the UN meetings. The criteria for selection focus on research skills and soft skills. The programme provides an opportunity for young people to gain experience and knowledge in international affairs and global challenges, the Economic and Social Council and their technical commissions, and engage in intergovernmental discussions and meetings. The programme provides a real professional experience on issues that matter in the world, and the opportunity to learn about the best practices in the youth sector. It also provides an opportunity to share youth concerns with the international community, build youth skills and capabilities, provide a networking opportunity, and represent the UAE in a diplomatic capacity.</p>	<p>https://un.youth.gov.ae</p>
<p>11. Mohammed Bin Rashid International Center for Endowment Consultancy</p>	<p>Managing the implementation of Dubai Endowments Strategy and projects, providing consultation services for endowment foundations and endowment options to maximise social impact, developing a monitoring system for endowment needs in the Arab world, and showing the impact to donors, managing knowledge in the field of Endowments through research and studies, improving the efficiency and capabilities building in the field of endowment management, the Center under FYA aims to simplify the process of endowment in a structured legal approach.</p>	<p>https://mbrgcec.ae</p>
<p>12. Youth Councils</p>	<p>By forming small youth groups, FYA claims they are guiding youth potential and energy to feed into the national sustainable development goals. Moreover, it enhances the spirit of loyalty and allegiance to the leadership. The initiative also aims to find good examples of youth who can represent the UAE in the international field, empower young people to solve their challenges and promote loyal citizenship. Youth Councils are designed to help implement and execute the UAE National Youth Strategy by creating youth groups across the Emirates that can design programmes and events towards specific goals that align with the Vision.</p>	<p>https://councils.youth.gov.ae/en</p>

13. Youth Retreat	By bringing together the highest government officials and decision-makers to sit with youth and hear them directly in a closed private setting, the event emphasises to youth their essential role. It allows them an opportunity to propose solutions to their challenges directly to leadership. It is an opportunity for them to be heard and spoken to. The youth retreat aims at activating the role of youth in the UAE's development. The event hosted the highest level of government officials with 'elite' youth to participate in roundtable discussions on different topics and issues. The Retreat had seven major stations: launch of the hope, a workshop of the Emirates Youth Council, sessions of the national dialogue on youth, the exhibition on the march of the UAE youth, mind feeding and development of skills and creative abilities, strategic laboratory, and the innovation platform.	https://retreat.youth.gov.ae
14. National Youth Dialogue	By offering an open channel, youth can share their thoughts and views with the world and UAE leadership. The Ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister announced on his Twitter account the launch of the #NationalYouthDialogue. He invited youth to share their views, issues, concerns, solutions, and any topic that came to their mind. He further posted questions asking, for example, “What are the values we want in our youth?” “What do we want from youth?” and “What do they want from us?”	https://dialogue.youth.gov.ae
15. Youth Agenda	By creating a youth agenda, FYA aimed to put youth at the core of engagement, position UAE youth as global role models, create a robust governance model to track youth achievements, involve different stakeholders to participate through the public and private sectors, base the agenda on credible sources of information, and include all youth in these processes. The agenda was developed by the FYA team (the Minister of Youth and her team, all younger than 35 years). The agenda aims to engage youth in shaping policy and solutions, to instil patriotism and Emirati values, identity, and culture, to educate youth in high-demand specialisations, to create responsible and stable youth, to support healthy and safe youth.	https://agenda.youth.gov.ae/en
16. UAE Government Leaders programme	By providing capacity-building programmes to support Emirati youth leadership skills, capabilities, and technical and soft skills, the FYA believes that they will build the next generation of government leaders and groom them to lead the country's development. The programme has different sub-initiatives under it which	https://www.uaeglp.gov.ae/en

	focus on building youth leadership capabilities.	
17. Youth Hub	FYA believes that the Hub space allows youth to connect, bounce creative ideas of each other, and build a strong network. The Hub is an idea to solve a challenge voiced by youth where they want to connect with other youth and share ideas in a central forum. The Hub offers a space dedicated to youth, whether students, employees, or entrepreneurs, to work in and connect with other youth.	https://hub.youth.gov.ae/en
18. Youth Debates	By conducting the Youth Debates, FYA believes they are offering an opportunity for youth to act on the most important issues to them. It allows youth to communicate effectively, think critically, and listen carefully, all of which are critical skills for youth to develop. Emirati youth can apply to debate any topic of interest. They are designed in two teams with a panel of judges and an audience who are asked to vote for the more convincing team.	https://debates.youth.gov.ae
19. Emirates Youth Summer Academy	By providing accessible learning opportunities through training and workshops, FYA believes that it can support building the skills and capabilities of youth across different age groups and sectors.	https://summer.youth.gov.ae
20. Emirates Youth Global Initiative	The initiative took place in the UK in 2019, in which a large forum hosted UAE ministers and public figures who gathered with Emirati students residing in the UK and spoke to them on different matters, showcased success experiences, and illustrated the importance of maintaining Emirati values. Also, the initiative aims to provide opportunities for young Emiratis to participate in global events and internships through promoting youth policies of inclusion globally and using youth as ambassadors to show the Emirati identity internationally.	https://eygi.youth.gov.ae/en
21. Emirates Youth Professional School	FYA believes the Professional school can provide a platform for youth skills development and increases employment choices for young nationals: “it provides full-length professional courses and executive education programme in various sectors through crowd-sourcing instructors, teachers, experts and professionals in the UAE in an uber-like model”.	https://school.youth.gov.ae/#

22. Youth Launchpad	Youth Launchpad offers young Emiratis an opportunity to start their businesses in different assigned public spaces across the country. Selected entrepreneurs are given a dedicated space to show and sell their businesses for a specific time. FYA believes that allowing this free opportunity enables Emirati youth to test and build their entrepreneurial skills. It also provides guiding and mentoring opportunities for entrepreneurs, as well as facilitates business licensing and essential technical support.	https://launchpad.youth.gov.ae/eng/home
23. Youth 101	In Youth 101, FYA aims to create a knowledge production project to build well-rounded, liberal arts education in the UAE, as well as matters related to foreign policy and world affairs. By involving youth to engage in the most challenging topics for the UAE, FYA aims to build and equip youth to lead the country's future. Youth 101 hosts different events in which ministers give a speech to walk youth in a stage format through their field. For example, the Minister of Economy gave a session to introduce youth to the UAE Economy. Also, there are different courses on government, entrepreneurship, and academia.	https://101.youth.gov.ae/en

To take a couple of examples, the FYA introduced the Emirates Youth Councils (no. 12) to engage young people in decision-making and setting the policy agenda. It also introduced the Arab Youth Center (no. 6) to support young Arabs to become role models in the region (Arab Youth Center, 2021). These approaches raised the UAE’s position as the preferred place for Arab youth, according to the Arab Youth Survey 2020 (Ryan, 2021) for the 9th year in a row. A further analysis is important to better understand how all of these efforts are impacting young Emiratis’ development and their personal choices. This section aimed to highlight the UAE’s efforts for Emirati youth over the past few years focusing on the FYA, specifically as it represents the youth sector across the seven Emirates. All of these are important to understand the current context of the youth sector in the UAE.

2.4 Conclusion

Since 1971, the UAE has experienced major changes in its economic vision as it moves from dependency on oil to diversifying its revenue base and towards a knowledge economy. At the same time, the UAE has aimed to strengthen its systems of political power and to support the development

of its labour market, for both Emiratis and non-Emiratis. The policies and reforms introduced over the past years are expected to contribute effectively to the UAE's economic vision. While government efforts could be considered promising, it is important to understand how Emirati youth, who make up almost 50 per cent of the entire Emirati population, perceive those policies and programmes. With deeper understanding, the government would be better equipped to analyse the impact of policies and programmes on the way young Emiratis make their education and career choices. The qualitative analysis on policy documents and the perspectives of policymakers and young people this research presents could provide important evidence to inform youth policies and programmes in the UAE.

To summarise, this chapter has contextualised the political, economic, educational, demographic, labour market, and youth sector landscapes while providing an overview of the situation historically, currently, and with future aspirations in mind. Emiratis are expected to play a role in supporting the UAE's vision and development of a knowledge economy. Thus, while there are many government policies and initiatives introduced to support the demography, the labour market imbalance, and educational reforms, a saturation of Emiratis in the public sector is still the case—"socio-cultural factors, coupled with the education infrastructure and the need for increased flow of foreign direct investment, have also contributed to the asymmetric demographic situation" (Sarker & Rahman, 2020, p.176). The most recent solution for the labour market imbalance was through *NAFIS* to increase the number of Emiratis in the private sector. As discussed in section 2.3, there are 13 programmes that have been launched to serve the initiative, which include imposing quotas and subsidies. It is, however, too soon to assess since *NAFIS* is a five-year programme that began in 2021 and remains ongoing. Moreover, earlier than this, the UAE introduced different initiatives under the FYA to support Emirati youth development and aspirations as claimed on the official FYA (2020) website³⁷. There are also policies and programmes that focus specifically on instilling nationalistic values among Emiratis and strengthening the Emirati identity. The development of youth policies seems to align with the

³⁷ Given the objectives of this research, I focus on differentiating between young people developing their skills, knowledge and confidence (youth development) and young people being offered opportunities to engage and influence change (youth empowerment). Youth engagement could fall under youth empowerment as part of empowering youth and including them in policy decisions (Jennings et al., 2006). Engagement could be seen as taking part in both development opportunities and empowerment opportunities

government's vision and agenda that, taken together, serve the monarchy's stability, economic growth, and support development.

This contextualisation is important for my exploration of how young people are responding to policy initiatives and to shed light on the factors that may be missing in policymaking. Such considerations could be social, cultural, or even other aspects that are yet to be investigated. Moreover, given the qualitative exploratory nature of my research, it provides an opportunity for new ideas to emerge from the data (see chapter 4). Therefore, new concepts will be introduced according to the findings in the relevant chapters. The next chapter provides a review of the extant literature, where theories and frameworks that could help analyse and explain the decisions of policymakers are approached. It also approaches actions by policy practitioners and the perceptions of young Emiratis within the context of the past and current political, economic, and social situation.

Chapter 3: Understanding Youth Policy and Decision-Making: Concepts and Frameworks

As Chapter 2 outlined, there have been extensive government efforts to tackle the UAE's labour market challenges through different reforms and incentivisation. Nonetheless, little is known about how those efforts are designed, how they are perceived, or how young nationals are reacting to them. Chapter 2 examined the country's political, economic, and educational development and relevant changes since 1971 and provided context around policymaking processes, as well as possible rationales behind the government's choices and youth preferences. In addition to this contextualisation, Chapter 3 aims to identify the relevant conceptual and theoretical frameworks that could help to inform the development of my research questions and findings. This chapter does so by reviewing the relevant academic literature on rentierism, youth transitions, and policy analysis. I engage with different concepts and frameworks in exploring what mentality and mindset could be influencing Emirati youth choices, and more broadly, the different factors which may influence youth transitions from education to the labour market. The design of youth development policies and programmes in the UAE is also explored.

The literature review is organised into three main sections. First, section 3.2 explores the relevance of rentier state theory to this research; section 3.3 approaches an understanding of youth transitions and the factors affecting them; and section 3.4 introduces a framework for analysing policymaking and how it might help illuminate recent policy formation which aims to engage and develop young people in the UAE. The chapter concludes (section 3.5) with general conceptual assumptions based on the literature reviewed, its relevancy, and how it can be applied to answer the three main research questions through the methodology and data analysis employed in my research.

Before starting the rest of this chapter, it could be helpful to summarise my approach to some key theoretical and empirical work. Rentier state theory (section 3.2) tends to be used to explain the explores rentier state theory, which theorists tend to use to explain the Middle East's economic and political landscape. Specifically, it is "a political economy theory that seeks to explain state-society relations in states that generate a large proportion of their income from rents, or externally-derived, unproductively-earned payments" (Gray, 2011, p. 1). The theory further developed to incorporate the concept of a rentier mentality that is possibly induced in Gulf (GCC) societies, including the UAE, due

to the state-citizens' relationship. I further expand the discussion to the work of Matthew Gray on "late rentierism" and engage with the work of Hertog (2020) on the rentier mentality to evaluate how it might relate to Emirati youth choices. Section 3.3 investigates the youth transition literature and how relevant it is to young people in the UAE. The systematic review by Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) on the factors which influence youth career choices, including the role of culture, is helpful in understanding Carpenter and Foster's (1977) intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions as a potential framework to use when analysing Emirati youth choices. Section 3.4 discusses Hall's (1997) 3I framework, which defines policymaking processes based on institutions, interests, and ideas, and offers potential to understand how the political, behavioural, and social angles influence the government's policy and programme choices. Compared to other approaches, the framework takes a sufficiently comprehensive approach to explain policy development and the differences between countries based on three main factors: institutions, interests, and ideas.

3.1 On rentierism, the rentier mentality, and late rentierism

To understand the economic and political situation in the Gulf and its influence on policymaking in the UAE, my research turned to the concept of a rentier state. This concept was initially coined by economist Hussein Mahdavy in 1970, who identified the effects of the oil boom on some Middle Eastern countries, focusing on the example of Iran. Rentierism has been developed and studied by many scholars over the years to contextualise the lack of democracy and the relationship between rulers and society in Arab states (Gray, 2011). Building on the work of Mahdavy (1970), Beblawi and Luciani (1987) developed rentier state theory (RST) to explain the political economy of certain oil producing countries, including Iran, some Latin American countries, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Oil, as mentioned earlier, has been the primary source of income for GCC states and their wealth since its discovery. GCC economies have relied, for a substantial proportion of their income, on rent paid by other countries for the purposes of oil extraction and exporting to the rest of the world. As a result, this has often been characterised as unproductive in earnings and payments. Specifically, this means that GCC states have gained their wealth because of their reliance on a natural resource and foreign labour rather than innovation, productivity, or hard work.

RST is sometimes used to explain how certain *rentier* traits exist in resource-rich states. These traits include the absence of a democratic government and associated taxation system, and also how these may be affecting the choices of individuals. It extends to explanations that link wealth with reduced domestic economic policy development (POMEPS, 2019). It has been argued that such economies generate expenditure policies that only to strengthen their political and economic autonomy, government power, and citizens' political passivity (Yamada & Hertog, 2020). To elaborate, following the discovery of oil, government wealth and political structure provided an opportunity for the rulers of those countries to control the economy and have autonomy while creating jobs for their citizens predominantly in the public sector. Other financial benefits for these citizens were guaranteed by a social contract in exchange for their loyalty and acceptance of the political and economic arrangements (Jones, 2017).

In sum, governments of rentier states have been expected by their citizens to provide a generous welfare system in return for having full economic and political autonomy without citizens' interference. The UAE is characterised in this way given its oil wealth and political structure (Hertog, 2016). Through the use of qualitative methods, this research explored how young Emiratis' choices may have been influenced by growing up in a rentier state and how this may have influenced their perceptions of their opportunities, how they plan their lives, and what motivates them in steering their education and career options.

“Rentier mentality” is a term often used to account for rentier state citizens' disinterest in engaging with political or economic matters. It has been argued that populations in the Gulf region show a high level of trust in and loyalty to their governments. For example, Hertog (2020) claims that “reliance on state patronage breaks the link between effort and reward, leads to low achievement orientation in economic life and makes citizens politically passive” (p. 6). In his study, he analysed the existence of a rentier mentality in GCC states using survey data and country-level descriptive statistics over a period of 30 years. Hertog highlights how the rentier mentality might have developed as a result of the political and economic structure that long existed in GCC states where the government is the ultimate wealth provider (including where job opportunities, education, and subsidies are concerned) in

exchange for patronage, loyalty, and acquaintance— he refers to this as the rentier social contract (Hertog, 2020, Hertog, 2010).

Furthermore, Hertog (2020) argues that, by default, the ratio of citizens employed in public vis-a-vis private sector makes Gulf societies structurally rentier: “While GCC public sectors no doubt include hard-working individuals, their overall size—disproportionately large by any reasonable measure— and the level of benefits provided imply that rent sharing and patronage are critical functions for them” (p. 8). In line with Hertog’s analysis, an International Labour Organization (ILO) study of 54 countries revealed that the share of public and private employment has averaged 28 per cent in the public sector versus 72 per cent in the private sector³⁸, whereas in the UAE, more than 90 per cent of employment is in the public sector. Also, another example is a survey conducted by Geoffrey Martin with students at Kuwait University. He notes that “overall the results of the survey fit with a conceptualisation of rentier mentality that accounts for culture, instead of just political, economic concerns” (Martin, 2019, p. 1). He further illustrates that Kuwaiti university students are not permitted to work in part-time jobs and must live at home until they are married (Martin, 2019). Martin’s study does not include Emirati students. However, given the similarities in both countries’ profiles (both rentier states in the GCC), my research aimed to assess whether the case is similar with young Emiratis.

Daleure’s (2016) qualitative study on Emirati Youth unemployment found that national job seekers rejected private-sector employment despite not finding jobs in the public sector. The study includes reference to the negative perception about private sector packages and working conditions. The study also discusses the possible impact of the social benefits and its contribution to youth unemployment. These benefits include education, health care subsidies, land, and interest free loans to build houses, as well as wedding cost assistance that discourages Emiratis to seek jobs beyond their personal preferences. The research also identifies the influences of the social, cultural, economic, and political factors on Emiratis’ career choices:

Toledo (2013) implies that if Emiratis were willing to accept lower pay and less amenable working conditions, the issue of unemployment would be resolved. However, this rationale is

³⁸ Source: https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/download/wp_pse_e.pdf.

much too simplistic because it does not acknowledge the social, cultural, economic, and political realities of the region. In other words, it is not promoting holistic economic sustainability (Daleure, 2016, p. 6)

Hertog's (2020) research indicates how GCC citizens' attitudes are compatible with "rentier mentality" traits. Specifically, GCC citizens expect their governments to resolve their employment challenges. For instance, "the 2015 Arab Youth Survey also shows that 68% of the GCC youth are confident that their governments can deal with unemployment problems, compared to only 33% in non-GCC Arab countries" (Hertog, 2020). The UAE is showing strong support for Emirati youth by creating the FYA and dedicated policies and programmes (see Chapter 2 for details). This thesis explore whether these initiatives may be instilling a sense of entitlement, encouraging further low political interest, and self-development. It therefore facilitates an understanding of how the rentier mentality may or may not have affected young nationals' education and career choices concerning the existing government's efforts under the FYA.

Scholars continue to label GCC states as resource-dependent economies that acquired wealth mainly by chance and not due to productivity, human capital development, or economic progressiveness (Hertog, 2020; Yamada, 2020). Some Western economists have criticised GCC states for being unsustainable, uncreative, and authoritarian (Jones, 2017; Gray 2011). Other economists have warned GCC states of the consequences of relying solely on oil income, referring to it as the "oil curse" or *resource curse* (Jones, 2017; Hertog, 2016, Hertog, 2010). That being said, the narrative is currently changing, with some GCC states actively looking beyond oil wealth to expand their economies—they are setting economic visions, diversifying revenue sources, investing in different fields, and developing new sectors based on sustainability, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Biygautane & Dargin, 2015). The UAE is one example here, where the country is attempting to focus more on productive and sustainable income through value creation compared with value extraction and by diversifying its economic income, developing its human capital, attracting talent, and exploring more sustainable sectors, such as clean energy, technology, AI, and space (Ross, 2012).

Mathew Gray (2011) explains why the traditional RST is insufficient to explain the gulf region's current economic and political state and suggests *late rentierism* as an alternative. His

conceptualisation of late rentierism characterises the GCC states' economic model as an entrepreneurial spirit supporting economic development and a more responsive and progressive system. Government policies and programmes seem to carefully rebalance and renegotiate the old social contract and rentier mentality (see Chapter 2 for details). This is evidenced by the UAE's vision of moving towards a more diversified, knowledge-based, and sustainable economy (UAE Government, 2020b). As an example, in 2015, the UAE Government eliminated transport subsidies and linked fuel prices to global oil and gas markets (Gengler & Lambert, 2016). Gray (2011) argues that the UAE will need to fully transition away from oil if it wishes not to be a rentier state.

The work of the collaborative Project on Middle Eastern Political Science (POMEPS) in 2019 titled *The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf* discusses a fine line between encouraging productivity while ensuring stability or negatively influencing young people's attitudes and motivation by showing excessive financial support. The evidence from Jones (2017) multimethod study investigating surveys, conducting experiments, and interviews suggests that the UAE Government's social engineering efforts have influenced the attitudes of Emirati youth towards tolerance, civic-mindedness, and patriotism, which feeds the interests of policymakers and ensures the legitimacy of the government, "at the same time, the evidence suggested that the campaign is leading to unintended consequences: it appears to be heightening entitlement in the form of belief in the right to a government job, while reducing interest in starting a business" (p.195). However, young Emiratis have continued to show a preference towards public sector employment and, from an economic perspective, have not exhibited the characteristics of more self-reliant citizens:

[The] new nationalism being promoted by UAE social engineers was itself partly to blame for intensifying economic and political entitlement attitudes. By offering excessive praise for citizens and their nation, it did not motivate hard work and high achievement so much as justify elite status. Such "feel-good" nationalism was therefore very helpful in promoting civic and patriotic attitudes, but not successful in fostering entrepreneurialism, risk-taking, and other development-friendly attitudes sought by leaders. (POMEPS, 2019, p. 69–70)

In my research, I define nationalism as the UAE Government's efforts in promoting and instilling values of patriotism, loyalty, and a strong Emirati identity in citizens using different approaches that celebrate citizens who dedicate their lives to serve their country; "nationalism is often viewed as a powerful means of motivating citizens to take risks and achieve, so strong that it can even motivate them to fight and die for their country on the battlefield" (Jones, 2017, p.08).³⁹ Similar to other countries, nationalism in the UAE is often promoted through civic education, social media, policies, and programmes aiming to instil a strong Emirati identity, loyalty, and patronage (Keating, 2009). The reform in the UAE's economic policies requires a greater understanding the current mentality of young Emiratis and their choices that could help the government better align or revise policy to achieve desired outcomes to ensure youth play a more active role in vital sectors that are key to the UAE's economic growth. I intend to draw on RST and the concept of "rentier mentality" to explore the extent to which they can help illuminate the perspectives of the policymakers and young people involved in this research, and if and whether these are changing. It is also important to keep in mind Mathew Gray's (2011) observation that rentierism may not be able to offer a comprehensive explanation:

There is more to Gulf politics than rents. Social change and reform, technology, globalisation, and other factors are important and are impacting the states in the region regardless of their rentier status. However, rents and rentierism are central to understanding the nature of Gulf regimes, their durability, their behavior, and the nature of their relationship with society. (p. 36)

The recent policy changes presented in Chapter 2 highlight how the UAE appears to be trying to alter what the social contract entails. Yamada (2020) discusses how the old definition of RST is no longer applicable to explain the GCC political economy, including that of the UAE. The absence of taxation and democracy does not necessarily mean that those rentier states are not committed to development. Yamada (2020) explains how the traditional rentierism theory should be revisited to better contextualise contemporary GCC economies, especially since they are increasingly showing traits of

³⁹ I provide more examples in the following chapters

productive economies by introducing domestic taxation and launching industrialisation and developmental visions.

The UAE's Fourth Industrial Revolution [4IR] Strategy, for example, "aims to accelerate the integration of 4IR solutions and applications across the UAE's industrial sector and increase its productivity by 30 per cent" (UAE Government, 2023f). Another recent example is the UAE's hosting of the Global Climate Summit in 2023 (COP 28), which focused on finding and adopting solutions for climate change. Such initiatives illustrate the country's commitment to economic development and environmental sustainability in moving away from oil. In other words, Beblawi and Luciani (1970)'s RST definition needs to accommodate the modern economic model in the GCC as they move towards "production states with rentier characteristics" (Yamada, 2020, p. 26).

This thesis assumes that the UAE's development will depend to a certain extent on how growth visions are approached and how local capabilities and endogenous human resources are built and developed (see Chapter 2 for more details). Yamada (2020) defines the current state of Gulf countries as follows:

Here it appears possible to identify the case of 'production with rentier characteristics'—a mode of production that is heavily reliant on oil-driven advantages such as low-cost feedstock, the availability of capital, and the importation of foreign labour. In other words, it rather represents economic diversification based on oil, rather than away from it. This mode of industrialisation makes sense for oil-exporting economies given that these are their distinctive comparative advantages, but neither is it effective enough to support their long-term non-oil growth—and hence evolution to production states—nor does it address the unemployment problem that inevitably emerges with the increase in local populations. (p. 27)

The choice of introducing new youth policies and programmes could have also been driven by the existing clientelistic structure of GCC states. This structure entails gradual approaches that aim to maintain citizens' satisfaction and approval of changes, approaches that are well-thought-of by the different Gulf countries' governments and policymakers (see 2.1.1). To illustrate, the loyalty-and-rewards system, also known as the social contract, is the basis of the monarchy and a critical component

of its resilience. Grasping the complexity of the region's politics is necessary to understand the attitudes and behaviours of young Emiratis and their choices. Consequently, based on my reading of the literature, it is argued that Yamada's (2020) modified version of the rentier state has greater potential to capture the current economic and political landscapes than Beblawi and Luciani's (1970) earlier definition of traditional RST. Nonetheless, recent critiques of the rentier state theory have questioned its persistence in Gulf states. For example, Freer (2017) discussed Islamic rentierism and its existence in the Gulf region, highlighting the brotherhood movement in Qatar and the UAE. While ideological values have triggered this move in the region, it is not generalisable and rigorous enough to weaken the rentier state theory's existence. The Brotherhood movement is a minority movement that occurred after the Arab Spring; this could have been ideologically, politically, or economically motivated while using religion as the official reason behind the move. Ideological values are far more complicated in this case and require further research to support the Islamic rentierism theory. Moreover, in a study by the Project on Middle East Political Science [POMEPS], Moritz (2019) highlighted the importance of looking into redefining rentierism and the relationship with society, "a better balance between state-centric and society-centric explanations for political mobilization, may help to generate new understandings of rents and societal quiescence" (p.42). The RST or late rentierism does not disqualify the importance of considering the different aspects and changes that affect the state-citizens relationship. However, the RST traits and impact are present in Gulf states and could influence the mindsets of young people and citizens generally.

RST is explored further in the methodology and findings chapters to evaluate if it has an impact on young nationals' mentalities and the way they make their choices. This section has discussed how a rentier mentality may affect the attitudes and behaviours of young nationals in relation to their perceptions of education and employment. The next section engages with the academic literature on wider youth transitions with an aim to understand what generally guides young people's career choices.

3.2 Understanding youth transitions

Research has investigated the various reasons underpinning young people's choices as they decide on their fields of study and occupations in efforts to transition to an independent life (Helve &

Evans, 2013; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Alnaser, 2018; Tassinari et al., 2015). Diverse circumstances help explain variation in outcomes for individuals, including structural opportunities and constraints along with the young person's skills, resources, and capabilities (Helve & Evans, 2013). In this section, some of the potential factors influencing young Emiratis' education and career transitions based on the literature review are discussed.

Youth transitions are not solely influenced by the institutional structures but also by the meaning, values, perceptions, and interpretation of the young person. As highlighted in Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018 systematic review:

The term "youth" is described by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a more fluid category than a fixed age group, and it refers to young people within the period of transitioning from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence and awareness of their interdependence as members of a community (p.01)⁴⁰

This characterisation means that many reasons and experiences could incentivise youth based on their individual journeys. For feasibility reasons, my research focuses on youth in their third and fourth year of university as they prepare to enter the labour market, make choices and decide on their paths forward.

Opportunities, expectations and limitations are all consciously or subconsciously affecting youths' decisions. Not only that, but young people's education and career choices could positively or negatively impact their overall wellbeing, whether mental, physical or socio-economical (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). To illustrate, many analysts who looked into the Arab Spring in 2011 have argued that youth unemployment and dissatisfaction were significant reasons behind youth activism and reactions—the Arab Spring movement started through social media and evolved to the streets in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Yemen (Drine, 2012). Youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region make up more than 30 per cent of its total population. This means that disengaging youth or not

⁴⁰ Source: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/info_sheet_youth.pdf

supporting them by providing education and work opportunities could easily lead to anger and negative reactions among what is a substantial proportion of a country's citizens. This is similar to what occurred during the Arab Spring as a result of high youth unemployment, political corruption, extreme poverty, and low economic decline in some Arab states (OECD, 2016).⁴¹

One way to understand some of the reasons behind youth choices is through understanding the main processes affecting youth decision-making. Lent et al. (1994) developed social cognitive career theory (SCCT), that focuses on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals, all of which are influenced by a person's ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic status, family support, and barriers, as well as how they relate to a person's educational and career trajectory. Building on Lent et al.'s work, Carpenter and Foster (1977) developed a framework to explain the main factors influencing career choices, all of which are defined by intrinsic, extrinsic, or interpersonal dimensions (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). This research employed Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework to analyse the empirical study of Emirati youth choices and perceptions.

Carpenter and Foster indicate that the intrinsic dimension includes factors that "relate to decisions emanating from self, and the actions that follow are stimulated by interest, enjoyment, curiosity or pleasure and they [the intrinsic factors] include personality traits, job satisfaction, advancement in career, and learning experiences" (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018, p. 2; Carpenter & Foster, 1979). The extrinsic dimension refers to the individual's aim for mainly social recognition and financial security, such as prestigious jobs, accessibility of jobs, as well as pay and benefits. The last dimension is the interpersonal (i.e., a person's relationship with family, friends, peers, and teachers, social responsibilities, and the degree of influence they have on a person's decision). As is explored further below, it has been argued that the role of the interpersonal dimension differs among youth from individualistic versus collectivistic cultures as these are perceived to influence young people's decisions in contrasting ways. For example, in a collectivistic culture such as the UAE bringing honour to the family is highly valued, whereas this is not valued as highly in individualistic cultures such as Australia,

⁴¹ The UAE Government has taken proactive measures to engage youth, develop them, and empower them, dedicating investments to support Arab youth across the MENA region. An example is the Arab Youth Center under the FYA that aims to empower and support young Arabs by engaging with them (Arab Youth Center, 2021).

United Kingdom (UK), and United States of America (USA) (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). This can affect the desire to conform and meet familial and social expectations in career planning.

In addition, geographical barriers may have an influence on young people's choices. In the UAE, it is well-known the best career options are more accessible and available in the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi; they are the wealthiest and most populated with the highest number of public and private schools and universities among the seven Emirates (Mansour, 2015; Amin-Ali, 2017). Gender intersects with geography in that not all families would entertain the idea of their daughters studying or working in another Emirate and living outside the family house for cultural reasons. What is socially acceptable for a young man to study or the jobs he works in is different than what is acceptable for a young woman. The aforementioned examples do not necessarily mean that all families are the same. Thus, these points were investigated in my focus groups with young people.

The socioeconomic status of the different Emirates is another influential factor on youth choices (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018.). In the UAE, smaller Emirates, compared with Dubai and Abu Dhabi, are not as wealthy and have fewer resources. Therefore, the limited availability of career opportunities in those smaller Emirates may make it more acceptable to some families residing in them to allow their offspring to work and reside in the wealthier Emirates, mainly Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Drawing on qualitative differences, Reay et al.'s (2022) study analysed the experiences of non-traditional applicants to higher education. While the study has not been conducted with young people in the UAE, the insights could be of relevance. The findings highlighted how geographical constraints have a strong influence on higher education choices (Reay et al., 2022).

As mentioned in earlier chapters, public sector employment is mainly taken up by Emiratis, meaning that if young people choose public sector employment or federal university options, their interaction with non-Emiratis is minimal. Social and educational background can influence choices. An example of this would be Emiratis studying in public schools as they are also isolated from other cultures. Meanwhile, parents who take their children to study at international schools are *making a choice* by allowing their children to interact and be exposed to different cultures from an early age. This could potentially affect their decisions as young adults (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018).

Akosah-Twumasi et al.'s (2018) systematic review explored the possible differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures and the factors that may be influencing youths' career choices in different countries. The review's search of the international literature did not identify Arab or GCC studies but the characteristics they associated resonate with collectivistic cultures like the UAE, and other GCC states. It observed that parental influence, interpersonal and extrinsic factors are significant when analysing youth choices in collectivistic cultures, whereas in individualistic cultures, the intrinsic dimension is the most dominant. In collectivistic cultures, personal interests are compromised to conform to group goals and the importance of complying with social norms. Lastly, the review highlighted that in collectivistic cultures,

intervention is understood [by parents] as a requirement to support their children's efforts and equip them to be responsible and economically productive. Meanwhile, the standard practice in individualistic societies is for parents to endorse their children's opinions and encourage them to choose careers that make them happy (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018, p. 14).

There are also young people who are bicultural as they combine cultural attitudes of two nations or ethnic groups or migrated with their parents to new cultures.

My research employed Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework (intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions) as the theoretical background to analyse the findings from the focus groups conducted with Emirati youth. This application is considered new since the previously mentioned review did not include the UAE or any other Arab country. The figure below (Figure 2) presents a diagram summarising the main factors that influence young people's career choices.

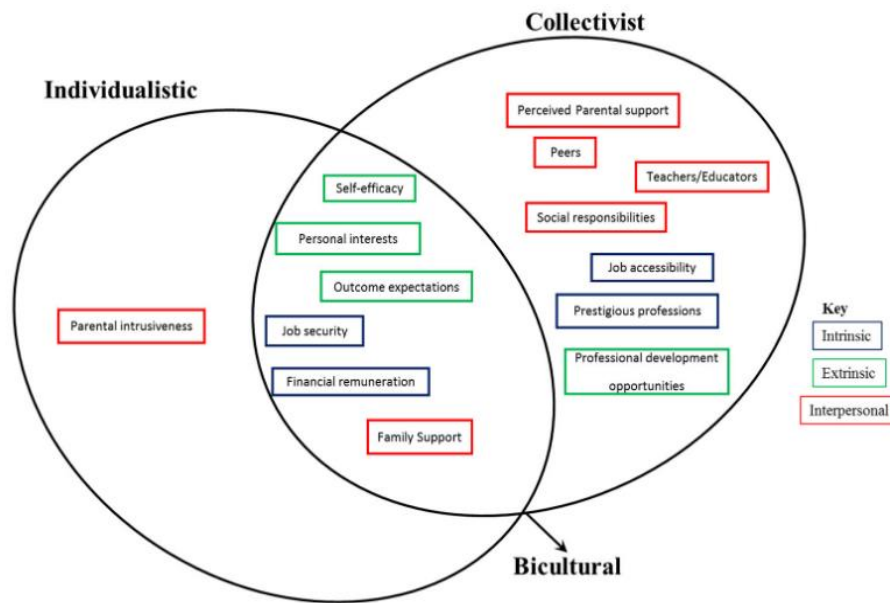


Figure 2⁴²: Factors influencing young people's career choices

Almoaibed's (2018) qualitative research investigated youth in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia who transitioned to Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET). Almoaibed's exploratory work is relevant as Saudi Arabia is a neighbouring GCC state with many cultural similarities (i.e., collectivistic, political and economic). She highlighted some of the main issues in the current youth transition literature, which is more focused on the role of the individual in making choices and some of the structural limitations. Almoaibed (2018) explained that the current literature on youth transition "is dotted with studies about pathways and trajectories, often focusing on performance and assessments rather than on the decision-making process itself" (p. 87). This structure-agency debate oversimplifies the complex process youth face when making choices. As Cuconato and Walther (2015) point out, "educational trajectories are neither structurally determined nor... the result of individual (rational) choice. Instead, they emerge from complex negotiation processes between young people and intervening others, particularly teachers and parents, and imply different levels of action and meaning-making" (p. 283).

Research on youth transition has evidenced that parents' social class, economic backgrounds, and educational backgrounds influence young people's choices and chances (Helve & Evans, 2013;

⁴²Source: Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018).

Franceschelli & Keating, 2018). By assuming that youth are presented with unlimited options and will choose the most suitable one, we are also assuming that youth decision-making is rational. The starting point for this research is that human beings, including youth, are subjective, and their choices are influenced by factors beyond the most rational choice. My research explores how youth make their choices based on limiting or supporting factors. For example, young Emiratis living in rural areas are by default presented with fewer opportunities than those living in urban, wealthier areas, be it as a result of familial or geographic constraints. When it comes to making education or career choices, geographic location and family expectations play a similar significant role (Vogt, 2018). The literature on youth transition continues to emphasise the role of academic transition on youth goals, opportunities, challenges, and social constraints (Evans & Helve, 2013). My research extends this scope to understand how young people's personal experiences influence their career choices.

Social scientists from the 1980s developed the idea of "individualisation", where more emphasis is placed on the role of agency in postmodern western societies and less influence of structures (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). This has been further debated between researchers examining youth transition and choices criticising the individualism discourse. Instead, they introduced the concept of structured individualism to better define the parameters of youth choices within the parameters of agency and its influence (Vogt, 2018; Brooks, 2009; Reay, 2004; Roberts, 1995). The structured individualism approach defines youth transition by considering the factors enabling and inhibiting young people's choices. For instance, young people could be influenced by the institutional structures they live within, whether this means the school, home, or place of living, all of which can strongly impact their choices. Moreover, rational choice theorists (e.g. Coleman (1990); Becker (1976)) assume that choices are free, focused on utility maximising, and independent from social constraints. They focus on economics concepts in explaining human behaviour. Such theorists have also been criticised for the limitations their insights have when considering how youth choices are influenced by many factors. As Vogt (2018) points out, "scholars have stressed that decision-making about employment and education should be considered as embedded social practices, taking account of wider social networks"

(p. 20)⁴³. Thus, the assumption in rational choice theory that youth transition occurs in a single and isolated episode is flawed for its inconsideration of the constraints on youth. The theory assumes that youth transition choices are both rational and free (Vogt, 2018; Heath et al., 2010).

Moreover, in line with understanding young Emiratis' choices, an unpacking of decision-making could also be useful. This research uses Hansson's (2005) definition of decision-making: "goal-directed behaviour in the presence of options" (p. 6). Paton (2007) developed a hybrid decision-making model that analyses young people's decision-making process. This model is defined as the "interaction between structural possibilities or barriers and subjective intentionality, considering individual actions of decision-makers, different rationalities, as well as external structures" (Cuconato, 2017, p. 46; Paton, 2007).

In other sociological work on young people's decision-making, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) investigated how individuals' horizons of action (i.e., perceived potential choices) relate to their educational and career choices. Their horizons of action could be influenced by external factors, available opportunities, personal interests, feasibility, accessibility, and social and cultural values, as well as the influence of friends, families, and institutional actors (Cuconato, 2017). This research assumes that all influential factors have the potential to shape individual decisions. In the literature review for this research, I looked at the structure and agency concept to understand what it entails—that is, "all empirical instances of human action; hence there are no concrete agents, but only actors who engage agentially with their structuring environments" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1004). To understand the structure and agency relationships, I turned to Bourdieu's work, and his concept of *habitus*. Specifically,

"Habitus is a concept... 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, 1977; Almoaibed, 2018, p. 100).

Bourdieu describes agency as a socialised body that reflects an individual's complicated relationship with the self, which evolves, develops, and changes based on the interactions and beliefs one forms in relation to the surrounding environment (Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, 2004). This means we cannot look at an individual's choice as their own. The different constraints imposed on them, whether consciously or subconsciously, and whether they are internally or externally imposed, are all influential (Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, 2004).

Bourdieu demonstrates the complexity of an individual's choices, which is constitutive of habitus but also a collection of family, social, and other influences "just as no two individual histories are identical so no two individual habituses are identical" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 46). Gender, race, and class are all interrelated in habitus. In his work, choice sits at the core of habitus. Thus, it is deeply entangled within and through the individual's environment. Those choices are highly influenced by the opportunities and limitations one puts on oneself and the external constraints. Specifically, "habitus is only an aspect of Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox. For Bourdieu it is the interaction of habitus, cultural capital and field that generates the logic of practice" (Reay, 2004, p. 435; Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's habitus emphasises how the role of agency, experiences, social and cultural contexts, actions, and decisions are all related to how young people make their decisions (Al Moaibed, 2019; Cuconato, 2017). Through the use of Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework, this research explores how these constraints (or enablers) influence young people's choices. The intrinsic, extrinsic and interpersonal dimensions are assumed to cover the previously mentioned factors under the different terminologies. However, if a finding did not fall under the three dimensions, this research further highlights any differences from the original framework.

Notwithstanding the many reasons why a young person chooses a specific field, degree major, or job, similar experiences play a role in shaping *choice* (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Brooks (2009) argues that young people today spend more time in full-time education compared with previous generations; these choices in return result in a later entry into the labour market (Brooks, 2009). The decision to spend more time in education could be attributed to easier access to education and the higher value attached to degrees, both in post-compulsory education and through government-supported

opportunities. I further explore this point next to understand how youth perceive the government's support for them.

Young people who depend on their families for financial support may be more inclined to wait for job opportunities that suit their personal preferences. In particular, my research explores the extent to which the socioeconomic status of young Emiratis may explain their willingness, or lack of it, to wait for public sector employment. Brooks (2009) discusses how structural changes in education and the labour market, as well as other socioeconomic, cultural, and familial factors, may have influenced youth choices. In many developing and developed countries, policymakers view tertiary education as an accessible option for the majority (Tremblay et al., 2012).

In the UAE, financial independence is not as important early in life as it is in Western societies—most Emiratis are expected to continue living with their families until they get married. It is common in GCC countries for young people to continue to live at their parents' houses even after marriage (Martin, 2019; Hertog, 2020). Thus, there is less urgency to find a job and be financially secure and independent than in most Western (individualistic) cultures. As Brooks (2009) points out, “the changing structure of the labour market, periods of recession and the increasing dominance of the so-called ‘knowledge economy’ have all had considerable impact on the experiences of young people as they come towards the end of their full-time education” (p. 4). There are potentially two main reasons why young adults' choices and approaches differ.

First, scholars have discussed the role of national welfare in influencing education-to-work policies (Brooks, 2009). To illustrate this, the UAE's overall wealth and financial comfort may have supported policymakers to take a more relaxed approach regarding youth-related policies, support, empowerment, and traditionally encouraging over-dependency or the rentier mentality (Martin, 2019; Hertog, 2020). It is not such a viable option for countries with fewer resources and less financial wealth, whether in addressing youth unemployment or other youth issues. This means there is no one-size-fits-all approach which is appropriate across country contexts.

Second, Brooks (2009) approaches the transition from education to work and its impact on young people, including skills acquisition, periods of training status, gap years, short-term employment, and the effect of volunteering, as all contributing to the education-to-employment experience. Hence,

the traditional assumption that youth move from school to the labour market is no longer sufficient, as the literature shows that there are different factors affecting this transition journey. From the perspective of young Emiratis, it is critical to understand the challenges they may be facing in the quality of their education, building their skills and capabilities, and how this impacts their choices around majors and employment.

The World Economic Forum's (2020) report argues that the youth skills gap is a major contributor to the challenges entrants face in work today. This is why my research, through the key informant interviews, explores how the UAE Government addresses the skills gap among Emirati youth through policies and programmes as they transition to the job market. Capabilities and skills are key factors that affect how individuals view their options as they make their choices (Helve & Evans, 2013). Helve and Evans (2013)'s work highlights the role of government policies in how they effectively support youth transition to the labour market, and this is a key area for investigation in my empirical study in terms of how the UAE's youth development policies and programmes support Emirati youth and contribute to the UAE's economic vision, as discussed in Chapter 2.

This research expects that there will be a few differences in the trends impacting young Emiratis' transition compared with those impacting young people in Western countries, and hence can make a contribution to the existing literature. For instance, and according to the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Economy (2024), there are multiple supporting initiatives to facilitate Emiratis joining the entrepreneurship⁴⁴ sector .. The government is trying to create jobs beyond public sector employment. This means that being employed in the public sector and having a business does not address the labour market's challenges. In engaging with young Emiratis and analysing their experiences and perceptions, my research increases current understandings of their aspirations, whether in public or private sector employment, or entrepreneurship.

In the UAE, as discussed earlier, most young Emiratis come from tribal and collective backgrounds, which creates a certain cultural and social capital, accumulated over years and specific to each individual's experiences. In this research, it was hypothesised that education and career choices

⁴⁴ I define entrepreneurship as self-employment, where individuals choose to set, organise, and manage a business while taking risks to make profits.

are strongly guided by the expectations of family and society. The research aimed to empirically explore how young people's collective experiences affect how they make their choices, along with the social and political institutions' potential influence on the choices they make. I draw on Bourdieu's concept of habitus as appropriate to complement Carpenter and Foster's dimensions of decision-making. The next section of this chapter provides a discussion on the last framework to be used to conceptualise and analyse the policymaking process.

3.3 Policymaking and Hall's 3I framework

In exploring the reasons behind policy choices and their design, this thesis aimed to improve current understandings of the rationale underpinning policymakers' and policy practitioners' decisions⁴⁵. The UAE may be facing a dilemma in building competitive and educated youth while maintaining political disengagement and passiveness—the balance between the two is critical. Abu-Shawish et al. (2021) point out that, the more that young Emiratis become critical thinkers, the more pressure the government experiences when trying to maintain the monarchy's legitimacy. My research employed Hall's 3I framework to assess how institutions, interests, and ideas influence policymakers' choices through the methodology employed for policymaking analyses.

Education, as discussed in Chapter 2, is key to the development of human capital. Abu-Shawish et al. (2021) discuss the role of education in supporting the development of human capital in the GCC region and the role it plays in achieving the economic growth visions of those countries, including the UAE. One of the topics analysed by Abu-Shawish et al. (2021) is the UAE's education system and its aspiration to build the "best" education system in the world. Policies and programmes may be perceived to have good intentions in terms of developing the capabilities and skills of their populations, but transferring policies adopted from Western cultures to implement in a region like the GCC that has a strong cultural identity and social practices can be problematic (Romanowski et al., 2018). In light of the challenges of policy borrowing, it seems highly unrealistic to expect education policies to work in the same way—given contextual and cultural differences—when brought from Western to Middle

⁴⁵ I define policymakers as members from the UAE government who make decisions and choices about policies. Policy practitioners are those who work in the government and implement the policies and programmes

Eastern countries, given their differing individualistic and collectivist cultures (Mohamed & Morris, 2019; Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016; Jones, 2015).

I further suggest that the motivation behind education choices and the value associated with education is likely to differ within youth populations in the same country as well as between young people living in contrasting national contexts. A key aim of my empirical study was to better understand the motives and rationales underpinning the educational and career choices of a diverse sample of young Emirati adults.

If policies are designed via a top-down approach or using external consultants, they can create and develop the ideal scenarios for public systems, such as education, with the intention of improving them, but this does not necessarily mean that they can be implemented effectively (Hall & Gingerich, 2009). Some evidence of this is that, despite the educational reforms in the UAE, the country's results in terms of international education performance are comparatively low. Some possible reasons for this put forward by the OECD (2018) are the lack of proper understanding of the local context, the capabilities of teachers, and the overall culture and attitudes of the students. In the case of education, parents may resist accepting government educational reforms that do not account for Islamic and traditional values or that contradict their social and cultural beliefs. Assuming a certain level of rentier mentality exists among Emirati youth, a mindset shift is arguably the first essential step to align youth, their motivations, choices, and the government's goals to achieve tangible results. As Helve and Evans (2013) highlight, motivation is a critical qualitative characteristic of youth transitions.

By guaranteeing Emiratis free public education as one of the social contract benefits, attaining a degree could be seen as more of a privilege than a necessity to secure a highly paid job in the preferred public sector (Martin, 2019)⁴⁶. Not only this, but youth are taught the importance of being good civil servants by serving the country and this appeal may also influence their career choices. Thus, education and career choices are likely influenced by young people's perceptions, as well as the structural constraints which guide their decisions. Structural constraints include the institutions that shape policies, along with the interests and ideas that often influence policy choices. Hall (1997) developed

⁴⁶ See Figure 9 in Appendix 14 for youth education by level and gender in the UAE.

the 3I framework to analyse what influences policymaking. The 3I framework consists of three main lenses, each of which are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The first of these lenses is institutions, and specifically how they structure formal and informal norms and rules to guide social functioning within organisations or larger arrangements (Gauvin, 2014; Hall, 1997). North (1990, as cited in Lesch & McCambridge, 2021) explains that “institutions can be conceptualised as ‘humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction’” (p. 3). Theorists also refer to institutions as the rules of the game and their impact on policymaking (Thompson & Quilliam, 2017; North, 1990). The rules of the game in some countries are set by the constitution or pre-existing policies, or else driven by the capabilities and resources within the institution itself. The UAE’s unique and longstanding federal monarchy is considered the most powerful institution in the country, with a decisive role in influencing policy decisions and setting the rules of the game.

The second lens is interests, which are rooted in the incentives for those involved in policymaking and their power to influence policy decisions. Stakeholders may be driven by different agendas or have personal incentives to promote certain policies over others for specific reasons (Peters, 2012). The UAE is based on the trust citizens have in their rulers and in the assumption that any decision, including relating to policy, is in their best interest (Antwi-Boateng & Binhuwaidin, 2017).

The third lens is ideas. This notion includes the ideals, values and beliefs that influence policies. Beliefs are also expressed as culture, values, and norms that constantly evolve and change among individuals (Béland, 2009). According to Hensley et al. (2020), “ideas are constantly changing and evolving as values, norms, theories, and beliefs change over time” (p. 74). This can be especially important in an institution structured like the UAE and helps explain why the government is trying to guide these changes, promoting certain identity ideals and values, and instilling them among Emirati youth.

Ideas matter because they can, both directly and indirectly, guide individuals’ behaviours, influence society through policy choices, and be used as a strategic tool to influence the country (Swinkels, 2020). The role that ideas and values such as nationalism and patriotism play in the context of the UAE seems crucial. These are promoted to Emirati nationals, including through social media campaigns, songs, and public events, where “rules and norms are communicated via the spread of

‘ideas’” (Cairney, 2012, p. 70). This research explores how, for the UAE Government, ideas might be viewed as a vital strategic tool leveraged to connect with the public to serve the institution’s interests and ensure stability (Hogan & Howlett, 2015).

In summary, the 3I framework can be deployed to analyse, illuminate and generate insights about the nature of policymaking through the lenses of institutions, interests, and ideas. The framework offers a tool for researchers to identify the most critical factors influencing policy development via the relationship between these different dimensions:

The analytical Framework of ideas, interests, and institutions has been used successfully in many different research disciplines to examine the public policy. The literature demonstrates the power of this Framework in research on institutional theory and organisations. (Hensley et al., 2020, p. 72)

This research is focused on understanding how the 3I framework can help analyse youth development policies and policymaking in the UAE, and what the implications might be of influencing youth decisions which make them productive and better able to contribute to the UAE’s economic growth vision. As discussed in Chapter 2, the government strongly supports Emirati youth through a range of targeted policies and programmes. Nevertheless, it is yet to be determined whether these policies and programmes are achieving the desired results, especially in how much they influence young Emiratis’ attitudes and behaviours. Exploring this topic through the three lenses of the framework may generate distinctive insights but might also reveal overlap between them. As Hensley et al. (2020) point out:

The interdependent nature of the relationships can make it difficult to separate each element without repetition. The complexity of the relationships can also be difficult to dissect with the interests of individual actors overlapping institutions such as a government department, community group, or commercial organization. (p. 83)

Finally, it is important to discuss the influence informal institutions have in the UAE. This includes the *Majlis* and channels of communications between the rulers and the citizens. In his book

Institutional Theory in Political Science, Peters (2019) highlights how informal institutions impact policy choices and their critical role. Given the relationship between the citizens and the government, an informal institution is essential for the UAE (Peters, 2019). The *Majlis* is the main informal institution greatly appreciated by Emirati citizens and is also an important institution for the rulers to maintain when considering this direct connection⁴⁷. The *Majlis* plays a vital role in the government's political stability through its ability to enhance engagement with the public. The *Majlis* setting is highly valued in tribal families, and tribal families constitute the majority group in the UAE (see Chapter 2 for details). This is a vital consideration given that some theories fail to account for the importance of such factors on the survival and efficacy of policies and institutions. As Hall and Lamont (2013) explain:

These perspectives neglect the extent to which institutions are also cultural artifacts, embodying particular ways of thinking and often built on reservoirs of authority with cultural roots. Cultural frameworks can structure social interaction with just as much force as the material incentives built into institutions. (p. 51)

In addition to theories that fail to account for formal and informal institutions, I reviewed different frameworks and theories in the political science field to identify the most suitable for my research. Upon completion of this process, I settled on Hall's framework. The alternatives included elite theory, which focuses on how the elite (i.e., UAE rulers in this case) provide the sole influence on policy decisions. It suggests that "public policy reflects elite values, serves elite ends, and is a product of the elite" (Anyebe, 2018, p.10). This means that other interests are not considered. This presents a shortcoming for this research, which seeks to examine the views of a wider set of stakeholders. For example, and as explained in Chapter 2, the government stated that young people are at the heart of policymaking, so including them in my study was important.

Another alternative framework was group theory, which "attempts to analyse how each of the various groups in a society tries to influence public policy to its advantage at the policy formulation level" (Anyebe, 2018, p. 11). However, this theoretical orientation is not applicable to the UAE's

⁴⁷ The President of the UAE opens his Majlis for citizens every week on Tuesday. Interested individuals must still obtain security clearance but everyone is welcome to attend.

monarchal system given that interest groups do not exist and are not supported politically as they can weaken political power and its stability (Anyebe, 2018). A third possibility was rational choice theory (RCT). RCT theorists assume that people choose the options which maximise their benefits and minimise their costs. However, this theorisation suggests that decision-making is mainly economically driven, suggesting that policymakers are autonomous and that free will (including culture and beliefs) are wholly removed from policy decisions (Hall & Taylor, 1996). This does not align with the aim of my research, to look at policymakers' subjective experiences and how policy choices are influenced.

In line with the criticisms made by March and Olsen (1989), I argue that it is problematic to overlook the influence of individuals' frame of reference and the impact that bounded rationality has on their choices. As Cairney and Oliver (2017) explain:

In part, bounded rationality relates to the fact that policymakers cannot gather and consider all evidence relevant to policy problems. Instead, they employ two shortcuts—'rational', pursuing clear goals and prioritising specific sources of information, and 'irrational', drawing on emotions, gut feelings, beliefs and habits to make decisions quickly. (p. 37)

In the UAE, policy decisions cannot be based solely on economic returns since the political institution is based on the loyalty values and nationalistic ideals instilled in Emiratis, and the social contract between the rulers and the ruled which has existed since the country was founded⁴⁸. I assume that any policy decision in the UAE is influenced by several factors beyond what is rational (i.e., policies are designed to feed specific interests, instill values and ideas, maintain institutional power, and ensure political stability and citizens' satisfaction).

The 3I Framework helps dissect and analyse the possible rationales behind policy choices in the UAE from the government perspective. The framework is also more commonly used in analyses and studies of health policies and this research has the opportunity to apply it to the youth sector in public policy and evaluate its usefulness, making it a key contribution of my research. In comparison to other approaches, Hall's framework is the most adaptable and applicable to the context of study

despite the differences in the political structure and policy approaches in the UAE compared with Western contexts.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the literature relevant to analysing policymaking and young people's decision-making in the context of the UAE. Little is known about this topic and, so, careful consideration has been given to how to relate and reflect on the concepts and frameworks in a way that is applicable to the UAE whilst also drawing out the associated differences and challenges.

The chapter began with the concept of rentierism and rentier state theory, which scholars often use to explain the political and economic context of countries in the GCC region. The discussion expanded to include the theory of "rentier mentality" to contextualise the mentality and mindsets of citizens in the Gulf and the UAE as a result of rentierism and the existing social contract. The literature on late rentierism was also discussed, which argues that the traditional idea of rentierism is no longer sufficient to explain the changes in some of the rentier states because of their approach to developing their economies. The UAE, for example, has made extensive efforts to diversify its economy and to sustain its growth through different investments and the exploration of new sectors.

In the second section of the chapter, an exploration of the relevant youth transition literature to analyse the factors which influence youth choices for employment was presented. Here, debates about the relative influence of individualistic and collectivistic cultures, and how this applies to the UAE, were highlighted. Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework was employed to explore how intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors could potentially be used to analyse Emirati youth choices. In the third section, Hall's (1997) 3I framework was introduced, with discussion focusing on how it could be applied to analyse the UAE's youth policies and programmes through the lenses of institutions, interests, and ideas.

The UAE is underexplored in academia and very few studies have explored youth transitions and the policymaking process. The research aimed to address this gap through three main approaches. First, the research uses a qualitative methodology to understand youth perceptions and the existence of the rentier mentality among current Emirati youth. Second, the research employs Carpenter and Foster

(1977)'s framework to explore decision-making in the context of the UAE. Third, Hall's (1997) 3I framework is used to investigate the youth policies in the UAE. The rationale behind using these two frameworks rests in their adaptability and generality, which can be tailored to different contexts without compromising the analyses and findings. Addressing the three main questions posed by this research could then be approached—specifically, *what influences the development of the UAE's youth policies? What influences young Emiratis' education and career choices?* and *How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth and young Emiratis' education and career choices relate to each other?* My thesis' evidence-based contribution, although not generalisable to other countries, can be used to better inform policymaking in the UAE and bridge the gap, if any, between young nationals' choices and policymakers' aspirations. Chapter 4 discusses the qualitative methodology employed for the research through document analysis, key informant interviews, and focus groups.

Chapter 4. Research design, Methodology, and Ethics

The previous two chapters presented the contextual and theoretical background for my research—that is, how the UAE is structured politically, economically, and socially, and the changes that have occurred over the years (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 then discussed the relevant literature and how Hall's (1997) 3I framework, the notion of rentier mentality (Hertog, 2020), and Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions of decision-making can be used as lenses to analyse the data. As mentioned, in this research, these different conceptual and theoretical resources have been used to understand the policymaking process in the UAE, as well as how and what may be influencing young Emiratis' educational and career choices in relation to the literature on youth transitions (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018).

This chapter presents the research design and methodological approach employed to address the three main research questions (see section 4.1) in order to generate understandings about how and why policymakers and young Emiratis make their respective decisions. Further, it provides an account of the study's multi-stage sequential design, data collection methods and participant samples. The first stage involved a documentary analysis of the policies and programmes under the Federal Youth Authority (FYA) from 2018, when the FYA was first established, to January 2021, when this research was commenced. The second stage aimed to understand the perceptions of the main actors in the field and involved ten key informant interviews with elite policymakers and policy practitioners. The elite interviews are often held with senior and executive positions to access exclusive insights from those who influence policy decisions (Harvey, 2011). In the UAE, similar to other Gulf countries, information is often held at the highest level (Mohamed & Morris, 2019). Following completion of the key informant interviews, the third stage comprised nine focus groups with young Emirati adults. The strength of focus groups in qualitative research lies in their ability to provide participants the opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences, facilitating the generation of original insights into complex behaviours and motivations (Morgan, 2003). This is critical to understanding the perceptions of Emirati youth and what influences their self-development choices in relation to education and career choices (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021).

The chapter is organised in three main sections. The first sets out and justifies the methodological approach. The second section reports and reflects on the methods used and their validity, with a detailed discussion on the employment of document analysis, key informant interviews, and focus groups. The last section presents the ethical considerations relevant to the research and its data management plan.

4.1 The methodological approach

Through exploring the relevant policy documents and the possible influential factors underpinning the choices of the two main sets of actors in the UAE youth sector, this research aimed to understand through the documents analysed what influences the development of the UAE's youth policies. To fulfil this aim, the research adopted a qualitative methodology involving different sources of evidence and types of data collection to help understand the limitations and challenges that youth and policymakers encounter in their decision-making. Understanding how 'choices' are made first entails a better understanding of what it means to have a choice. The qualitative methodological approach used in this research enables clarity around the process of making choices based on the perspectives of different stakeholders. It also enables identification and evaluation of the factors influencing this. As Hays (1994) points out:

The meaning of choice in this context, however, should be specified to avoid three pitfalls that are particularly prevalent in Western thinking. First, choice does not necessarily imply intentionality. Choices can be conscious or unconscious, with intended or unintended consequences. Second, although we tend to conceive of choices as individual decisions implying individual freedom, choices are always socially shaped and are also quite regularly collective choices. Finally, as its social nature makes clear, the agency is not simply 'noise' or the realm of incomprehensible contingencies. (p. 66)

Aligning with Hays' definition, this research assumes that choices are subjective and often guided by the external structures—including social and cultural institutions—which influence individuals' trajectories.

A review of the available policy and empirical literature has highlighted the lack of evidence needed to address key research questions (see Chapter 2 – section 2.3). Specifically, are FYA policies and programmes in the UAE aiming to empower, develop, and encourage young Emiratis to consider private-sector employment? Are they effective in influencing young Emiratis' attitudes towards education and employment choices? And how do youth react and relate to them? For instance, the PWC (2023) Emiratisation survey showed that young Emiratis still prefer public-sector employment, evidenced by the low rate of Emiratis in the private sector (less than 4 per cent in 2021). The limited availability and access to the quantitative data of trends and changes in the UAE education and labour market landscape pointed to the appropriateness of a qualitative methodological approach to address the research questions. In particular, my research adopted an interpretative constructivist approach to gather and analyse the rich data collected (Cohen et al., 2011), with an investigation into whether the pre-existing social contract between Emirati youth and the government may have an impact on this or whether there are other influential factors at play.

The research assumes that “reality is individually constructed; there are as many realities as individuals” (Scotland, 2012, p. 11). Reality cannot be separated from the subjective experiences of humans, which impact, in one way or another, their choices. As Cohen et al. (2011) observe:

Social science is thus seen as a subjective rather than an objective undertaking, as a means of dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts, and where social scientists understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants; the participants themselves define the social reality (p. 15).

Therefore, by engaging directly with UAE elite policymakers, policy practitioners, and Emirati youth, this research aimed to explore the influential factors behind the choices made. This approach allowed the research to generate knowledge about policymaking in the UAE and the behaviours of Emirati youth in terms of education and career. This would not have been possible through the use of quantitative methods.

Given the differences in the UAE's political structure, its culture, history, and economy compared with Western democracies and individualistic cultures, Hall's adaptable (1997) 3I framework

was deemed suitable for analysing policy-making in a context such as that of the UAE. In studying the MENA region's economic wealth, specifically the Gulf states, analysts often reference rentierism theory (see Chapter 3 for details; Hertog, 2020; Herb, 2005; Beblawi, 1987). The relevance and influence of rentierism can be identified and illuminated through examining two of the lenses, ideas and interests, included in the 3I framework. Lastly, in reviewing the youth transitions literature, Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors can be utilised to unpack the influences on individual career choices (see Chapter 3). The use of the three conceptual lenses to analyse the data generated in this research constitutes the unique contribution this research makes to the wider literature in this area.

The research assumes that policies and programmes do not work on their own and that effective communication and engagement in the design process are critical to the achievement of desired outcomes (Mahmud, 2017). Therefore, the focus is not on the implementation phase of policies and programmes but on understanding the 'how' and 'why' behind the choices policymakers and youth make. Here, the 3I framework is employed to analyse the FYA policy and programme documents and the data from the key informant interviews to judge whether a rentier mentality, as discussed by Hertog (2020), exists among Emirati youth and whether it exists through the three dimensions of intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors. Using the methods selected, the research aimed to answer three main research questions:

1. What influences the development of UAE youth policies and programmes?
2. What influences Emirati youth education and career choices?
3. How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth and young Emiratis' education and career choices relate to each other?

The previous section provided an overview of the research design and qualitative methodology. The next section discusses the methods and processes followed prior, during, and after the data collection in greater depth.

4.2 Methods

This section describes the methods employed in the research, including a presentation of the sampling frame, recruitment process, transcription steps for the key informant interviews and focus groups, as well as the analyses. Qualitative research is a loosely defined term that includes extensive research tools, has a wide range of meanings, and covers a heterogeneity of fields (Cohen et al., 2016). In qualitative methods, researchers are often interested in understanding attitudes and perceptions and interpreting human subjective experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative researchers focus on making meaning based on their analyses and understandings of participants' experiences and behaviours, in addition to links to their motivations (Creswell, 2013). While my research does not provide statistically generalisable results, it still offers theoretically generalisable findings in terms of designing youth policies and programmes in the UAE and in similar contexts (e.g., gulf states) which could help to maximise outcomes through the creation of qualitative evidence-informed youth initiatives (Carminati, 2018).

Document analysis, key informant interviews, and focus groups were employed consecutively in my three-stage design. Document analysis can be used either as the sole data source or as a complementary source to primary data (Kayesa & Shung-King, 2020). Researchers can choose to use document analysis as a first stage, allowing for a thorough review of selected documents (e.g., policies, reports, guidelines, memos, etc.) before engaging with other methods. In line with this approach, I began with a textual analysis of the relevant FYA documents before engaging with participants (Browne et al., 2018). I then conducted key informant interviews as the second stage in the data collection process for the purpose of exploring the influences on policy makers' choices, and why specific policies or programmes have been developed. Lastly, I used focus groups to engage with young people. This was done to understand their thinking about their education and career choices, as well as how they perceive the government's youth-related policies and programmes. I intended to investigate what influences Emirati youths' education and career choices and in what ways UAE youth policies relate to their education and career choices.

The analysis of the three kinds of evidence outlined above enabled comparison and triangulation across the whole data set. This comprehensive and holistic approach is thought to have the potential to generate original insights into how young people react to the UAE Government’s initiatives. The table below (Table 4) provides an overview of the data collection methods used in this research. Of the various approaches to thematic analysis, I chose reflexive thematic analysis for its relatively straightforward approach and clear guidance available suitable for focusing analysis on themes and their theoretical basis, derived from a diversity of sources, to take into account socio-cultural contexts (Braun & Clarke (2021). Using a reflexive thematic analysis, I started by familiarising myself with the datasets, coding, and developing initial themes. Once the analysis was completed, I continued to review, refine, and further develop the themes to answer my main research questions comprehensively; Braun & Clarke (2006)

Table 4: Overview of research questions and methodology

Research questions	- Source of data and methods inquiry	Sampling frame	Method of analysis	Theoretical background
1. What influences the development of the UAE’s youth policies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Document analysis - Key informant and policymakers’ interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purposive sampling for DA and Interviews - Snowball sampling for interviews 	Thematic analysis	3I framework
2. What influences young Emiratis’ education and career choices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emirati youth in higher education through focus groups - National Service: male recruits’ focus groups 	Purposive sampling	Thematic analysis	Rentier mentality Late rentierism Dimensions of intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors
3. How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth and young Emiratis’ education and career choices relate to each other?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The critical informant and policymakers’ interviews - Emirati youth in higher education focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purposive sampling for DA and interviews - Snowball sampling for interviews 	Thematic analysis	3I framework Dimensions of intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors

4.2.1 Document analysis

As a qualitative method, document analysis is used to evaluate printed or electronic documents, mainly where the researcher is expected to find meaning, deepening understanding, and contribute to

empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Documents are often defined as written material sources related to a specific topic, which vary based on their purposes. This includes agendas, registers, minutes of meetings, archived government policies, manuals, government websites, books, brochures, journals, memos, maps, newspapers, press releases, summary, scripts, reports, survey data, guidelines, and other public records (Bowen, 2009; Kayesa & Shung-King, 2020). The researcher is also responsible for selecting reliable sources when sorting the documents for analysis and examining the quality of the information presented. Document analysis is considered efficient, stable, and cost-effective, providing a broad coverage of the relevant information—it is advantageous in many ways (Bowen, 2009).

In my research, document analysis was employed to critically analyse how policies and programmes—as articulated on the official UAE Government website—were introduced, as well as their overall design, intended outcomes, and implementation processes from the government’s perspective. The findings from the document analysis fed into the development of the key informant interviews and focus groups and contributed to evaluating how and why governments choose specific policies and the claims they make. As document analysis includes policy analysis, the terms will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis (Browne et al., 2018). The method “provides researchers with a powerful tool to understand the use of research evidence in policymaking and generate a heightened understanding of the values, interests and political contexts underpinning policy decisions” (Browne et al., 2018, p. 1).

The empirical study commenced with a document analysis of 23 youth-related policies and programmes launched after the FYA was established in 2018 until January 2021 when this research started. The reasons these 23 policies and programmes were selected are as follows. First, the FYA is the central entity dedicated to youth affairs in the UAE. Second, the publicly available information identified provides reliable and credible sources of information on the relevant policies and programmes. Third, limiting the analysis to a specific timeframe helped to ensure the feasibility of the analysis without risking missing information, as new policies and programmes may have been introduced as my research progressed. Finally, the selection provided an opportunity to steer the discussion on existing policies and programmes during the key informant interviews.

The analysis served as a foundation for designing the interview guides and it focused on what the policies and programmes claim to address according to statements made on the FYA website for each policy and programme (Hensley et al., 2020; Sandhu et al., 2021). The document analysis was employed to help address the first research question, and the specific use of the 3I framework helped to mitigate my own biases and manage my reflexivity as the analysis was guided and constrained by this conceptual framework.

Table 5: Overview of the document analysis performed for the UAE’s FYA

Set of policies	- Official online Federal Youth Authority (FYA) websites
Period	Between April 2018 and January 2021
Identification	- Under the FYA - Target segment is youth - Publicly available
Framework	- 3I framework

First, I organised the relevant documents into Excel spreadsheets to create a table that included the name of a programme or policy, its overall description, and the claim made based on its defined aims and visions, all of which was supported by textual data and evidence. As a second step, the texts and quotes were manually indexed with word tags to create codes. Then, I employed a deductive strategy to analyse the coded texts and generate emerging themes linked to Hall’s 3I lenses. This step was completed by going through the overall descriptions of the policy texts. The same strategy was followed to draw meaningful themes and sub-themes that aligned with the institution, interest, and idea lenses supported by the codes created. Some texts fit under more than one lens which I then added my own commentary and reflection on each of the 23 policies and programmes. The data organisation followed an iterative process and a summative strategy to concisely develop the themes as they relate to the research question on what influences youth policies and programmes.

I chose the 3I framework to analyse the FYA documents to examine how the values, ideas, institutions, processes, and interests, and other factors (all of which fall under the 3I lenses) influence policy decisions. Based on the data gathered from the documents and key informant interviews, insights were drawn on how these aspects apply to and illuminate the development of FYA policies and programmes. The following section discusses the use of key informant interviews, the second stage in

my inquiry, and how document analysis helped to inform the design of the interview questions and sampling criterion.

4.2.2 Key informant interviews

My initial goal was to interview elite informants only, where such informants are “key decision-makers who have extensive and exclusive information and the ability to influence important firm outcomes, either alone or jointly with others (e.g., on a board of directors)” (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021, p. 2). However, after further investigation, I realised that additionally conducting interviews with policy practitioners could offer a more holistic view of individuals’ perceptions and experiences, whether they are those deciding on policy choices or those required to implement them. The rationale was not to assess the implementation of the policies and programmes but to identify if there are gaps in the approach. Policy practitioners are responsible for taking practical steps to bring the policies and programmes to life (Cherney & Head, 2010), and to gain a broader perspective, it seemed important to include the voices of elite policymakers and policy practitioners, both of whom have first-hand knowledge of the UAE’s youth sector. This approach also enabled me to expand the analyses through my engagement with individuals holding a different level of expertise and who may have different insights, rather than limiting it to elite policymakers alone (Browne et al., 2018).

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the conceptual framework helped to analyse the policy choices from the point of view of the decision-makers, including the *why* and *how* specific policies were chosen. To develop my sample, I began by listing the potential policymakers who are relevant to the youth sector, leveraging my network to reach out to their offices. While potential participants who knew me from my previous work experience were easier to convince, others were slightly hesitant. The ethics forms developed for the research helped to reassure participants that their responses would be anonymised and kept confidential. Consequently, they were comfortable taking part in the research (ethical considerations are discussed in more detail in the next section).

In sampling participants, consideration was given to the recruitment of interviewees from the main entities involved with the youth policies and programmes relating to education and employment. These are the FYA, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human Resources, Emiratisation, and

NAFIS.⁴⁹ In recruiting the interview participants, the snowball sampling approach was followed to send formal invitations to the relevant government officials, advisors, policymakers, and policy practitioners⁵⁰ (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021). Ten interviews were conducted in total and questions were tweaked slightly to fit each interviewee’s background and expertise. The reason behind the criteria and diversity was to include the perceptions of the main stakeholders in the youth sector at the federal level. It was also to include different experience levels and balancing representation from the government side. Elite interviews alone would have compromised the gathering of information on the practical experiences of those required to implement the policies and programmes—that is, those who face different challenges and issues that are important to understand their perceptions. Drawing on the findings from the document analysis, the questions were crafted to elicit information on how the policy development process occurs in practice. The findings from the document analysis (discussed in the next chapter) revealed only descriptions, claims, and aims, as well as textual evidence of the policies and programmes. There was no clarity on *what* and *who* influences policy or programme choices, and why specific choices were made (see Appendix 1 for a sample questionnaire designed for the key informant interviews). At least one elite interviewee and one policy practitioner from each entity were included⁵¹. The participants were diverse in their backgrounds, experiences, age groups, and career trajectory. They varied by overall years of experience, years spent in their current positions, and their areas of focus within the policymaking process. Policy makers’ and policy practitioners’ seniority and years of experience were not the same and had some differences. For privacy and ethical reasons, detailed information about the participants has not been shared to avoid disclosing their identities. Table 6 below presents a summary of the characteristics of the interview sample.

Table 6 Recruitment and characteristics of key informants

- 5 policymakers (elite)	Seniority: Government officials and director generals: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, Federal Youth Authority, and NAFIS
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⁴⁹ The details regarding NAFIS are presented in Chapter 2.

⁵⁰ I began with using the snowballing approach, meaning that I approached my contacts from the relevant entities.

⁵¹ By entity, I refer to the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour Market and Emiratisation, FYA, and NAFIS.

- 5 policy practitioners	Experience: Mid-level as policy and programme implementers: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, Federal Youth Authority, and NAFIS
Sectors	Education, labour market, economics, youth
Years of expertise	Ranging between 5 and 35 years of experience
Length in positions	Ranging between 1 and 7 years

All interviewees were approached directly and invited via email to secure the interviews during my time in Dubai in October, 2022. Participants were given the option to choose between in-person or online. Some participants were keen to have virtual interviews regardless of my location, which is why some interviews were conducted online rather than in-person. Though in-person interviews were my preference to better analyse body language and avoid technical issues, virtual interviews seemed more efficient and feasible for most invitees as field work was conducted immediately after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.

The aim of the interviews was to gather reliable information from sampled officials to enable me to make credible claims about youth policymaking and policy decisions, discover new information that is unavailable in public documents to understand the rationale behind policy choices, and inform the analysis when addressing the first and third research questions (Leech, 2002). Two main challenges were identified from the key informant interviews:

1. Some participants were more comfortable speaking in Arabic. Thus, a guide was designed in Arabic and the data collected was translated to English without compromising the meaning.
2. Some elite interviewees allowed less time than initially anticipated. Subsequently, all points of discussion had to be covered during the time available (ranging between 30 to 90 minutes), prioritising the most important questions given the expertise of each person interviewed.

Upon completion of data collection, I began the transcription process. The transcription followed two steps with the consent of the participants. First, recordings were made of interviews for transcription purposes. I used the Otter AI tool to transcribe the English recordings automatically. Second,

transcriptions were revised by listening again to the recordings and verifying the written words. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, there were no external transcribers and no peer review of the written words. NVIVO was used to organise and sort the data from each interview, and the data was pseudonymised while transcribing to ensure ethical protocols were followed and privacy was maintained.

The next step of the data translation process was more challenging than expected as half of the participants in the key informant interviews were more comfortable speaking in Arabic. This meant that Otter AI was not an option since the spoken language was a mix of English and Arabic. By repeatedly listening to the recordings and completing the translation review process three times, an additional quality-check layer was added. Notwithstanding this, being a native Arabic speaker and Emirati myself was an advantage in doing the translations. Multiple rounds of editing before coding and analysing the data were required. This helped to ensure the credibility and integrity of data were maintained.

A deductive strategy, as used in the document analysis, was used to generate meaning from the coded data and identify themes through the lenses of Hall’s 3I framework. The application of the framework was key to generating a deeper analysis of how the policies and programmes were designed from key informants’ perspectives and to identify what the influential lenses were. It also complemented my approach to the document analysis. Below (Table 6) is a summary of how the 3I framework was applied to analyse the key informant interviews.

Table 7: Summary description of the 3I framework lenses applied to the key informant interviews

Theoretical Framework	Description	Related findings/ codes
Ideas	Defined as ideas, perceptions, values, beliefs, knowledge, evidence, and norms that individuals have and how they influence policymaking	Visions (youth activation, youth development, youth empowerment, youth engagement)/values/stories/ youth challenges/government challenges/other challenges
Institutions	Defined as structures, rules, jurisdictions, policy legacies, and networks that influence policymaking	Policymaking process/Policymaking through engagement/policymaking assessment/structuring the youth sector

Interests	Defined as how individuals', groups', and stakeholders' motives influence policymaking	General interest/youth interest/UAE's interest
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Once the data were fully transcribed, translated, and reviewed, I employed a two-step coding process using NVIVO. The first involved coding the data to fit under each of Hall's 3I framework lenses (see example in Figure 3). The second step involved creating meaningful themes relevant to addressing the first and third research questions.

Figure 3: Codes and sub-codes under the ideas lens⁵²

Ideas
Government challenges
Other challenges
Stories
Values Nationalism through strengthening Emirati identity, loyalty, and patronage
Vision
youth activation
youth development
youth empowerment
youth engagement
Youth challenges

4.2.3 Focus groups

I adopted a purposive approach to building my focus group sample (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Consideration was given to recruit young Emirati females and males from different disciplinary backgrounds in their third and fourth year of university, including male National Service recruits to help understand if those experiences influenced how youth see their opportunities. Each focus group was primarily homogeneous to ensure participants were comfortable to speak and share their views. Diversity was achieved across the total focus groups conducted (Acocella, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). For example, I made sure that young individuals studying in segregated universities were interviewed in a same sex group. The table below (Table 7) shows a summary of the focus group recruitment.

⁵² Institution and interest lens codes and sub-codes are presented in the Appendix, figures 2 and 3.

Table 8: Summary of focus group recruitment

Total focus groups participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National Service recruits – males; through snowball sampling (6 total) 2. Federal University (urban) – females; directly through institution (6 total) 3. Federal University (urban) – males; directly through institution (6 total) 4. Federal University (suburban) – females; directly through institution (8 total) 5. Federal University (suburban) – males; directly through institution (6 total) 6. Private university – mix; through direct recruitment and social media advertisement (6 total) 7. Private university – mix; directly through institution and social media advertisement (4 total) 8. Emirati students abroad – mix; through the Ministry of Education (6 total) 9. Emirati students abroad – mix; through direct recruitment and social media advertisement (6 total)
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All focus groups took place in Abu Dhabi or Dubai. While majority of participants came from these emirates, there were some participants from the other five emirates - The recruitment did not look into the socio-economic backgrounds
Age	Ranged between 19 and 28 years old
Total participants	- 54 total: 30 males and 24 females
Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal on collected data and findings - Assessment of existence of rentier mentality on findings only

I chose purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds of young Emiratis. The scale of the empirical work was limited in time and capacity. Therefore, I wanted to maximise the voices included, covering the main typical experiences Emirati youth have. I chose focus groups to gather collective data through interactions and discussions rather than individualistic perceptions. To explain, one-to-one interviews helped generate deep, personal, and individual views from youth on what influences their choices of education and career and their perceptions of the youth sector, policies, and programmes under the FYA. However, given the study's goal, focus groups seemed more suitable to generate rich data on young people's shared experiences, efficiency in the method, and mimicking natural social settings (Morgan, 2003). To reduce social desirability bias, I designed the focus groups for participants from similar backgrounds to ensure homogeneity. This being said, focus groups run the risk of group conformity and participants wanting to align their thoughts. I intended to manage this through the questionnaire's design and my role in facilitating the discussion.

Prior to the focus groups, participants completed a proforma designed to complement the focus groups and verify collected information rather than to be analysed separately. It allowed the participants

to answer questions individually that would not have been possible in the focus group's structure. It is essential to mention that 42 out of 54 participants filled in the proformas, and not all questions were answered comprehensively. The proformas were completed at the beginning of the EYFG sessions to collect basic demographic information and ask specific questions about their choices (see Appendix 17 for a sample). In terms of questions, the proformas had two sections: questions in section 1 included basic demographics and attributes of the 42 participants (gender, marital status, education), and section 2 aimed to understand young people's personal choices and rationale to support findings from the conducted EYFGs and to understand their own perceptions better (see Table 14). The proformas and focus groups were designed to generate insights to inform the second and third research questions.

- **Pilot Focus Group**

Once the focus group selection criteria, sites of inquiry, and plan were all detailed, a pilot study was conducted to test the field questions, proformas and tools employed (see Appendix). The pilot focus group was necessary to ensure the timeline feasibility and homogeneity between participants, and to receive feedback from the participants on the design of questions, the flow of conversation, and the management of the facilitator. The process included the following:

1. Conduct a mixed gender focus group to evaluate
 - a. setting,
 - b. questions,
 - c. willingness to speak, and
 - d. flow of discussion
2. Explore the implications of conducting the same format for all-male and all-female focus groups dependent on the selection criteria and participant backgrounds.
3. Test length of the session and homogeneity.
4. Test the engagement of male participants with a female Emirati facilitator.

After the preliminary analysis of the data during the pilot study, I realised that some of the questions required revision as they appeared vague to the participants. For example, instead of asking participants *What jobs are socially acceptable for females?* the question was revised to *What jobs are socially unacceptable for females?*, a question which was logically more appropriate as it was easier for

participants to answer rather than most jobs being seen as socially acceptable. The majority of participants who came from a public university seemed more comfortable speaking in Arabic. Therefore, I added a question on the *preferred language of discussion* in the proforma before the focus groups to be mindful of before conducting the sessions. This was also stated in the focus group introductory statement (see Appendix 3). Lastly, the findings from the document analysis and key informant interviews both fed into the development of the focus group questions and sampling criteria. Specifically, the document analysis highlighted several assumptions the FYA make in the development of policies and programmes and their expected outcomes and engagement, whereas the key informant interviewees shared their perceptions on how youth would and should be reacting to the government's efforts. The design of the focus groups was developed with an aim to gather data that contributed to my analysis and triangulated with the findings from the two other methods.

In a nutshell, the pilot study produced rich data on the experiences of the youth who took part. For example, the National Service experience was found to have positively impacted the decision of one of the male participants to pursue his education and take a serious approach towards his studies compared with his approach before the National Service period. This is especially interesting when the usual social narrative is that National Service negatively influences young males' choices regarding education, making military jobs more appealing as a career option with higher pay and less education required. The pilot also helped refine some of the questions to avoid being too specific—for instance, *Do youth aspire to be ministers?* This question was removed due to it being too much of a leading question.

One of the challenges encountered involved encouraging two participants, who were quieter than other participants, to speak and share their experiences. Here, I faced an ethical dilemma regarding how to encourage them to speak without making them feel uncomfortable. To help ensure they did not shy away from answering, I attempted to ask the questions differently and avoid eye contact with them. These measures helped to a certain extent. Conducting the pilot focus group was highly beneficial in testing the focus group interview process, enabling revisions to the approach originally envisaged and ensuring that the 60–90-minute sessions would be productive.

- **Conducting focus groups**

An introductory statement, ethical consent, and a questionnaire guide based on the research themes were developed for the focus groups (see appendix 3, 4, and 7). Akin to the key informant interviews, elaborative questions were sporadically added, and others ignored whenever participants had already addressed them during the interaction. The guide also helped keep focus groups on track, covering all major themes of discussion.

In terms of structure, those who studied in mixed universities were comfortable in mixed environments—all mixed focus groups included the exact number of male and female participants to avoid imbalances. Language preference was also addressed through the earlier proformas to ensure that participants were comfortable with the language used during the sessions. Participants were also consistently reminded of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the sessions. As a researcher, I could not guarantee that participants would not share any information externally. Nonetheless, I followed several steps to try and minimise the risk. These included participants' signing of the consent forms, verbal reminders, and the use of first names only.

The voluntary recruitment of participants proved harder than I had anticipated. Initially, I intended to recruit participants through the Ministry of Education and its Cultural Attaches for the study-abroad students. However, the process proved to be quite ineffective as the students were unresponsive to these entities. Thus, the pre-work for the field research took longer than expected. Not only that, since focus groups were planned for December, 2022, which is when students have their winter break, most students declined the invitation to participate. To resolve the matter, I utilised my direct network of contacts, employing multiple approaches to find participants and complete the intended number of focus groups. In one exceptional case, the turnout for one of the mixed gender private university focus groups was a mere four participants instead of the 6–8 envisaged. Given the valuable insights gathered from that particular session, despite its shorter than anticipated duration, I decided to keep the data collected for analysis. Finally, I had to fly back to Dubai in February, 2023,

to complete two focus groups with Emirati students in suburban areas as it was not possible to secure participants during December, 2022⁵³.

This was done with help from the relevant institution. The institutions identified were contacted directly and invited to help recruit individuals who fulfilled the inclusion criterion. Additionally, all required ethics forms were sent to the institutional contacts beforehand to ensure ethics standards were met (see Appendix 6).

I also wanted to include participants who experienced the National Service (hereafter, ‘the Service’), which was introduced in 2014 as mandatory for males and optional for females. Given the interest and focus of my research and my intention to incorporate diverse voices of young Emiratis, the Service recruits are included in the EYFGs to collect information on their experiences and relevance to their choices. The selection was age-based, between 19 and 21 years, rather than the year of study, as some Service recruits could have chosen not to continue their education and stay in a military career or work elsewhere.

I drew on Carpenter and Foster (1977)’s main dimensions of intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors to analyse the evidence, noting that the data also revealed other factors that impact and guide youth education and employment choices. To ensure the process was comprehensive, codes were included even if they fell outside the three dimensions. The coding underpinned insights into what may influence youth choices for education and employment based on their mindsets, values, challenges, and engagement with the policies and programmes. Table 8 (below) maps out my thematic analysis to help elicit answers to the first and third main research questions.

Table 9: Thematic analysis of focus group data

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
2. What influences young Emiratis’ education and career choices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence youth choices - Limitations in choices - Rentier mentality through youth entitlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal aspirations, financial incentives, and career progression play an essential role in influencing young males’ and females’ choices - Access to opportunities and social networks affects the choices youth make - Availability of job opportunities as a primary challenge - Youth entitlement and preference of public sector jobs regardless of government’s efforts

⁵³ For inclusivity purposes, I wanted to ensure I collected the perceptions of both young nationals in urban and suburban areas.

		and concerns about the treatment in the private sector (entrepreneurship is seen as part-time) - National Service impacts young males' choices regarding education and career - National Service is a hurdle which gets in the way of young males achieving their goals - Socioeconomic, cultural and family factors significantly influence how young individuals see their opportunities
3. How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth and young Emiratis' education and career choices relate to each other?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was a common lack of awareness of the programmes and policies under the FYA - There was minimal recognition of the UAE Youth Minister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willingness to work hard, develop themselves, and serve the country - Public sector employment seen as an act of service - Strong awareness about <i>NAFIS</i> initiatives - Youth values predominantly revolve around nationalism, loyalty and religion - Negative perceptions of National Service

Transcription of the focus group interviews followed the same steps as those for the key informant interviews, which included the Otter AI tool to transcribe English recordings. I manually completed the transcription of the sessions that were mixed between Arabic and English while simultaneously revising the Otter AI transcription. I additionally used NVIVO to organise and sort the data from the focus groups, pseudonymising the data while transcribing to ensure ethical procedures were followed.

I used codes developed under Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal framework to explore what influences youth education and employment choices. Table 9 (below) shows this, as well as other codes that were generated during the coding process.

Table 10: Coding process for focus group data

Extrinsic	Jobs, pay, prestige, social recognition, future, access to jobs, benefits
Interpersonal	Relationship with family, friends, peers, teachers, social responsibilities
Intrinsic	Interest, enjoyment, curiosity or pleasure; and they include personality traits, job satisfaction, advancement in career, and learning experiences
Mindset	
Perception about NS policy	
Perception of youth policies	Minister's appointment, FYA policies, FYA programmes
Values	
Youth challenges	

The previous section provided an overview of the data collection approach for each method in terms of the processes followed for the document analysis, key informant interviews, and focus groups. The approaches were employed to complement each other and provide comprehensive insights on what influences UAE youth policy choices and what influences young Emiratis' choices through the conceptual frameworks. In using Hall's (1987) 3I framework, the aim was to explore how institutions, interests, and ideas influence FYA policies and programmes. Then, in using the Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions, the research aimed to analyse what influences young Emiratis' choices and then critically investigate whether the rentierism theory through the rentier mentality exists among Emirati youth (a discussion on this is presented in Chapter 6). While Hall's 3I Framework and Carpenter and Foster's share some similarities in the definitions of lenses and dimensions and how they investigate choices, the main difference is that Hall's 3I Framework was developed to analyse policy choices while Carpenter and Foster's dimensions were developed to analyse young people's career choices. The similarities lay in how both frameworks look at how internal versus external factors play a role in influencing "choice" whether this relates to policies or young people. The next section details the ethics process and how the data was managed.

4.3 Ethical considerations and data management

I developed a data management plan to ensure ethical considerations were met, taking into account that data collection was completed outside the UK and involved Emirati youth and government officials. This section discusses the ethics and data management plan developed for this research to ensure the rights and privacy of participants was and is maintained. I start by presenting the data management and storage plan for each method, the validity of the data collected, followed by the ethical implications and reflexive considerations.

Table 10 (below) is divided into three main sections, covering the three methods through description of the data collected, the data lifecycle plan, the data formats, data storage and management during research, as well as organisation and labelling.

Table 11: Research data management plan

Data Description	
Type of information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Document analysis (publicly available) 2. Key informant interview recordings and transcripts 3. Focus group recordings and transcripts
Methods of capture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UAE Federal Youth Authority websites 2. Key informant interviews (online) 3. Focus groups (face-to-face)
Amount of data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 23 policy and programme documents 2. 10 key informant interviews 3. 9 focus groups (54 participants)
Data lifecycle	
Data capture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Document analysis of the UAE FYA policies and programmes between 2018 and 2021 2. Key informant interviews – between August 2022 and October 2022 3. Focus groups – between December 2022 and February 2023
Data storage	Encrypted using password and finger-protected USB – between 2021 and 2025
Data transcription	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Downloaded as PDFs for the FYA documents 2. Audio-recorded for key informant interviews - between August 2022 and October 2022 3. Audio recorded pro software for iPhone for focus groups - between January 2023 and June 2023
Data cleansing	Pseudonymised data and assigned codes/aliases – between August 2022 and June 2023
Data analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Used Excel spreadsheets for document analysis 2. Used NVivo for key informant interviews and 3. focus groups – between August 2022 and June 2023
Data translation	Translated relevant data – between August 2022 and June 2023
Data archiving	Destroy recordings and save transcripts in an encrypted external hard drive
Data formats	
Document analysis	Online policies and programmes under the Federal Youth Authority websites
Key informant interviews	Microsoft Teams recording feature
Focus groups	MP4 recordings using Voice Record Pro for iPhone
Data analysis software	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NVivo 2. Excel
Data storage and management during research	
MP4 recordings	Exported to encrypted external hardware and deleted from the phone
Teams video recordings	Exported to encrypted external hardware and deleted from the laptop
Backup	Primary copies were stored in a second encrypted hardware drive during the research
Organisation and labelling	
Security of data	Password and finger/face recognition devices Remove all identifiable information through anonymisation Data storage encryptions on an external hard drive Data will only be used in compliance with consent forms
Data sharing	Data will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher
Data storage after research	Recordings will be securely deleted after the completion of my research Transcriptions will be securely deleted after the completion of my research

For the data collection process (i.e., document analysis, key informant interviews and focus groups), the research followed the UK's [Social Research Association \(SRA\)](#) ethical practice and guidelines. All participants were voluntarily recruited and briefed on the purpose of the study, their roles and responsibilities in the research, and how their data would be used (see Appendix 3 and 4). Nonetheless, concerns about privacy-related issues and anonymity assurance were addressed before data collection, and all participants signed consent forms (Social Research Association, 2021). Also, since key informant interviews involved very high-level government officials, the extent to which information about the individual could be shared was agreed upon in advance.

For the document analysis, I followed UCL's ethics requirements by completing the relevant forms and having them reviewed by my primary supervisor and an additional faculty member within the Institute of Education (IOE). Given that the documents used were collected from public government sites, obtaining further approvals was unnecessary. As for the key informant interviews, participants were invited directly. Once they confirmed their participation, I sent the information sheet along with the consent form to be signed before conducting the interview. All interviewees were reminded of the importance of their participation and the potential benefits of the findings towards developing knowledge and improving and informing policymaking in the UAE (SRA, 2021).

Moreover, concerns about participation were addressed and all participants knew their right to withdraw at any stage. Since some interviewees were more comfortable speaking in Arabic, interviews were adapted to their preferences. Given that policymaking in the UAE is held at the top level and participants were senior government officials, the option to review the transcripts was given to key informants. I explained that the voice recording of the interviews would be transcribed and deleted from the recording device.

One reflection from the interviews is that participants, whether elite policymakers or policy practitioners, whom I knew from my previous work experience, felt comfortable disclosing information and stories without hesitation. In comparison, those I met for the first time required more convincing to take part in the research. For example, one of the interviewees who did not know me was still hesitant about audio-recording the interview but was convinced when I clarified that other senior government officials did not mind the recording. Their hesitation was further alleviated when I offered to share a

copy of the transcription with them. Another participant asked me to finish my interviews with all other senior officials before conducting a one-on-one with the same participant. In the UAE, data is highly regarded, and government officials are often hesitant at first to share information, particularly since the data collected were held in this case by an academic researcher studying in the UK. From my previous work experience, I understood that engaging with researchers is uncommon unless the government owns the project or study. I therefore very much appreciated their acceptance of my invitation to participate in the research.

In respect to the focus groups, no ethical approvals were required in the UAE since recruitment of participants was undertaken directly and was voluntary, as advised by the Ministry of Education's Scientific Research and Ethics Committee. Five of the focus groups, which included third- and fourth-year university students, recruited participants through their academic institutions, with any ethics requirement cleared directly with each institution. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for the National Service focus group, with no ethics clearance required. All focus group participants had to read the information sheet, complete the proformas and sign a consent form ahead of the session (see Appendix 3 and 4). Institutions were also required to sign consent forms to confirm that student participation was voluntary and that their contribution had no impact on their academic grades (see Appendix 6).

The focus group data were saved on my iPhone 12, with passcode and facial recognition protection. Data were also backed up on my laptop, with fingerprint and password protection. All electronic data were also saved offline on my laptop and encrypted using an external hard drive which is fingerprint protected. No data were saved on the cloud to avoid any leaks. Moreover, invitation letters to participants and institutions outlined and emphasised that participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw at any time.

4.3.1 Data validity and reflexive considerations

Among the main challenges faced by researchers using qualitative methods is ensuring data validity. The wider literature argues that the methods used, given their nature, can result in *subjective* data that compromises the quality of the work and analysis presented (Rolfe, 2006). Researchers using

qualitative methods often rely on multiple checks to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of data. In this research, all methods are qualitative, with several checks ensuring data validity. For instance, document analysis followed a coding and thematic analysis to minimise the risk that I would impose my own subjective judgements of the policies and programmes.

As I began the key informant interviews, I transcribed and conducted a preliminary analysis of the data collected from participants. Upon completing all interviews, I allocated a no-analysis phase to create a space between the preliminary and detailed analyses. The space in between allowed for the opportunity to step out of the research before diving into the critical and detailed process. Also, translating the transcription from Arabic to English for the key informant interviews and focus groups required multiple steps given that this stage was done by myself. It was important to ensure that meaning was not lost in translation, especially in the experiences and stories shared by my participants (Twinn, 1997).

Then, to ensure the validity of the focus group data, I aimed to manage my reflexivity, reactivity, and influence by trying to maximise participants' opportunity to influence the process of data collection and outcomes of the research (Berger, 2015). In facilitating the focus groups, I aimed not to interfere in the discussions but to allow individuals to convey their own personal experiences, tell their stories, and share their opinions with each other (Berger, 2015). The main goal was to gather rich data which could be used to analyse the attitudes and behaviours of young Emiratis with regard to their education and career choices in relation to the policies and programmes introduced by the FYA between 2018 and 2021 (Flick, 2018). In summary, the process of detaching myself from the data before revisiting it throughout the process helped to create a fresh perspective when analysing it.

Lastly, as a researcher, I recognise and acknowledge the importance of being aware of the self-reinforcing effect. Therefore, I constantly monitored my reflexivity to minimise my bias in interpreting the data and constructing meanings (Scotland, 2012). As I reflected on how the participants might have felt and what they might have thought during the focus groups and interviews, how their values and beliefs might have influenced their answers, and how my approach could be adapted to better facilitate the discussion, my aim was to maintain self-awareness and observe the data and findings from an outsider's perspective. With reliance on the theoretical frameworks used in this research, this was done

to channel my reflexivity towards becoming more connected to drawing valuable knowledge from the participants' perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2010).

While the focus of my research was on contributing to our current knowledge of youth-related policymaking processes in the UAE and how young Emiratis engage with these, I was not interested in taking any political stance. Rather, my focus was on engagement and alignment in government objectives for youth as well as provide constructive feedback on the UAE's youth vision. That being said it is important to note that the UAE's Ministry of Education fully sponsored my postgraduate studies without interfering in the subject and scope of my research, inspired by my previous work experience working under the UAE's Education and Human Resources Council⁵⁴.

4.4 Conclusion

To some extent, the data and information generated from the interviews and focus groups were selective since the methodology to employ participants was dependent on a set of criteria and was not random. Yet, as my findings chapters (chapter 5, 6, and 7) show, the methods were designed to develop a deep understanding of how policymakers develop and design youth policies, how young people make their education and career choices based on what is essential to them, and how young people engage with the youth policies and programmes based on their awareness and interests. Evidently, and despite the complexities involved, the multi-stage research design with its three methods and different types of data enable interpretation of the behaviours of young Emiratis. This is further strengthened with the conceptual frameworks and analytical approach used, which provided knowledge exclusive to the UAE as a case study. The frameworks helped to manage my subjectivity through practicing reflexivity and self-introspection prior, during, and after data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2010).

The nine focus groups with 54 young Emiratis, ten key informant interviews, and 23 document analyses generated voluminous qualitative data. This presented as both advantageous and disadvantageous as the diverse and broad perceptions required rigorous, critical analysis to sort and organise the data through the use of recurring themes. In the following two chapters, I present the

⁵⁴ The UAE Education and Human Resources Council is a federal entity established to suggest policies and conduct research studies which could feed into developing nationals in education and the labour market.

findings from the data in relation to the frameworks used towards developing a better understanding of what influences youth policy design in the UAE, what influences young Emiratis' education and employment choices, and how youth relate to the government's efforts.

Chapter 5: Document Analysis Findings

Political structures, power distribution, economic, historical, and social landscapes in different countries influence the process of policymaking in various ways. In democratic versus non-democratic countries, citizens take a more active role in policy decisions. As an example of the latter, the UAE relies on its institutional structure to guide the formation of public policies, including those relevant to young people. However, the UAE Government has recently shown some signs that the narrative may be changing and that youth engagement is being encouraged in policy decisions. As discussed in earlier chapters, the limited literature and publicly available information on the UAE’s policymaking processes for youth warranted a deeper qualitative understanding. This was gained by examining related government documents and engaging in conversations with main actors in the youth field as one part of the analysis in this research. As discussed in chapters 2 and 4, I investigated 23 policies and programmes under the FYA between 2018 and 2021 (see table 11 below). Chapter 4 detailed the methodological approach, sampling steps, and processes for the three main research methods.

This chapter presents the findings from the document analysis divided into three sub-sections relating to the three lenses of Hall’s (1997) 3I framework presented below in the order of ideas, institutions, and interests. I identify the implications and emerging themes which then informed the design of the key informant interview guide.

Table 12: Summary of the FYA document analysis

<u>Policy/Programme</u>	<u>Description</u>
1. 100 Mentors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Programme</u> 	Through arranging 100 sessions with the 100 mentors selected from private and public sectors, FYA aims to “enhance” young Emiratis’ skills and “refine” their expertise in different fields . The format is a stage where the selected mentor sits with the moderator, followed by questions asked by the moderator or the audience, mainly the youth segment.
2. Fakhr <i>(Fakhr is an Arabic word translating to ‘pride’)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>programme</u> 	Through the celebration of the National Service recruits , where the government and Emiratis share their gratitude and appreciation for the recruits. The Forum occurs on an annual basis and is organised by the FYA. It was introduced shortly after the mandatory males’ National Service programme was launched in 2014.
3. Flow Café <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>programme</u> 	FYA designed the cafe to create a social platform which provides networking opportunities through the provision of organic and healthy foods.

<p>4. Youth Data Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>programme</u> 	<p>Through public and private sector partnerships, the initiative aims to better understand the pulse of the youth by analysing collected data to drive insights, devise solutions, and inform policies through youth-centric data.</p>
<p>5. Youth Circles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>The initiative aims to gather data and recommendations through youth, crowdsourcing ideas, skills, and talent to identify solutions for government challenges, receive direct feedback for policy ideas directly from youth, send direct messages to youth, and engage with youth to understand their aspirations and opinions on different topics towards enhancing policymaking.</p>
<p>6. Arab Youth Center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>To develop initiatives and programmes to benefit the region, engage youth in discussions with decision-makers, build a better future for Arab youth, and create the first Arab youth strategy.</p>
<p>7. Done by Youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>The “Done by Youth” stamp is awarded to Emirati youth entrepreneurs. The process is done through an application for the “Done by Youth” stamp under the FYA website.</p>
<p>8. Youth Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Policy</u> 	<p>By engaging with youth through different communication channels and initiatives to gather their opinions and attitudes towards the challenges they face and propose suitable and feasible solutions. Approved youth policies include the Youth Engagement Policy, Youth Board of Directors Policy, Youth Participation in Official Delegations Policy, and Youth Housing Awareness Policy.</p>
<p>9. Emirates Youth Values National Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>FYA aims to teach Emirati cultural values, strengthen the role of youth in adopting, spreading, and transferring Emirati values, and create a positive image of Emiratis in different contexts.</p>
<p>10. Youth Delegate Programme to the United Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>The programme allows selected Emirati youth delegates to participate in the world’s largest intergovernmental organisation, which provides an opportunity for learning, building skills, and exposure. two individuals between the ages of 20 and 26 get to attend the UN meetings. The criteria for selection focus on research skills and soft skills.</p>
<p>11. Mohammed Bin Rashid International Center for Endowment Consultancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>The Center under FYA aims to simplify the process of endowment in a structured legal approach.</p>
<p>12. Youth Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme</u> 	<p>The initiative aims to find good examples of youth who can represent the UAE on the international stage, empower young people to solve their challenges and promote loyal citizenship. Youth Councils are designed to help implement and execute the UAE National Youth Strategy by creating youth groups across the Emirates which can design programmes and events towards specific goals which align with the Vision.</p>
<p>13. Youth Retreat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>programme</u> 	<p>By bringing together the highest government officials and decision-makers to sit with youth and hear them directly in a closed private setting, the event attempts to demonstrate to youth their essential role. It affords them an opportunity to propose solutions to their challenges directly to leadership. This programme happened prior to the official establ</p>

<p>14. National Youth Dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>The Ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister announced on his Twitter account the launch of the #NationalYouthDialogue. He invited youth to share their views, issues, concerns, solutions, and any topic that came to their mind.</p>
<p>15. Youth Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy 	<p>The agenda was developed by the FYA team (the Minister of Youth and her team, all younger than 35 years old). The agenda aims to engage youth in shaping policy and solutions, to instil patriotism and Emirati values, identity, and culture; to educate youth in high-demand specialisations; to create responsible and stable youth; and to support healthy and safety-conscious youth.</p>
<p>16. UAE Government Leaders Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>By providing capacity-building programmes to support Emirati youth leadership skills, capabilities, and technical and soft skills, the FYA believes that they will build the next generation of government leaders and groom them to lead the country's development.</p>
<p>17. Youth Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>FYA believes that the Hub space allows youth to connect, bounce creative ideas, and build a strong network. The Hub offers a space dedicated to youth, whether students, employees, or entrepreneurs, to work in and connect with other youth.</p>
<p>18. Youth Debates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>Offering an opportunity for youth to act on the most important issues to them. This programme allows youth to communicate effectively, think critically, and listen carefully.</p>
<p>19. Emirates Youth Summer Academy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>By providing accessible learning opportunities through training and workshops, FYA believes that it can support building the skills and capabilities of youth across different age groups and sectors</p>
<p>20. Emirates Youth Global Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>The initiative took place in the UK in 2019, in which a large forum hosted UAE ministers and public figures, who gathered with Emirati students residing in the UK and spoke to them on different matters, showcased success experiences, and illustrated the importance of maintaining Emirati values.</p>
<p>21. Emirates Youth Professional School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>FYA believes the Professional school can provide a platform for youth skills development and increase employment choices for young nationals</p>
<p>22. Youth Launchpad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>Youth Launchpad offers young Emiratis an opportunity to start their businesses in different assigned public spaces across the country. Selected entrepreneurs are given a dedicated space to show and sell their businesses for a specific time.</p>
<p>23. Youth 101</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme 	<p>FYA aims to create a knowledge production project to build well-rounded, liberal arts education in the UAE, as well as matters related to foreign policy and world affairs. Youth 101 hosts different events in which Ministers give a speech to walk youth in a stage format through their field.</p>

5.1 Ideas

The ideas lens refers to the ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, evidence, and norms an individual or societies have and how they may have influenced policy decisions. As discussed in Chapter 3, ideas seem to play the most critical role in policy choices in UAE youth policies and programmes. Youth

policies and programmes may have been leveraged as a strategic tool to instil specific ideas which can be communicated to the youth in the government's interests which will be explored further in the next two chapters.

Ideas matter because they constantly evolve and change. They are influenced by internal and external factors and frames of reference which affect individuals and policymakers (Béland, 2019). Two of the main themes which emerged from the document analysis are the idealisation of nationalism and loyalty influencing FYA initiatives, as well as claims regarding evidence-informed designs. The third theme emerging from the analysis is that government expectations of Emirati youth are revealed in the design of its policies and programmes.

5.1.1 Nationalism and loyalty ideals

Strengthening nationalism and loyalty among Emirati youth was the most evident idea which emerged across all 23 policies and programmes examined. This was apparent in FYA's high-level mission to instil the value of serving the country in youth. The FYA's communication of its policies and programmes reinforced this point. A strong emphasis on encouraging Emiratis to retain their Emirati identity, traditions, and values was identified. The *Fakhr* programme was identified as the most patriotic example. This programme was developed to show "pride and gratitude" to UAE National Service youth recruits and recognise their sacrifices for the country. Some of the most senior government officials attended the annual event, thanking and appreciating the recruits. Government leaders and rulers have also shown their gratitude on various platforms. For instance, the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, tweeted on his official account, "National service graduates are the pride of their families, the pride of their country, and the pride in the history of the UAE. Great national days that our country is going through" (Federal Youth Authority, 2023a).

Moreover, the official website had a video dedicated to National Service recruits from Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi then, and President of the UAE now, in which he loaned his voice to snippets and photos of men in the military and emphasised the UAE's role in this "dark world" being the inspirational light for other countries and people (Federal

Youth Authority, 2023a).⁵⁵ Another example of patriotism was how the Emirates Youth Values National Programme was introduced to instil Emirati traditions and values among youth. The programme was sponsored by the wife of the Founder of the UAE, Fatima bin Mubarak, commonly referred to as the *Mother of the Nation*, with an aim “to demonstrate the keenness of Emirati youth to help others by proving the values of giving, benevolence, cooperation, and love of others” (Federal Youth Authority, 2021).

5.1.2 Evidence-informed design?

The FYA claims that its policies and programmes are designed using an evidence-informed approach. This is rationalised through the processes of engaging the youth, collecting data directly from youth, and collaborating with different entities. FYA also emphasises the importance of incorporating youth voices into policymaking. This was apparent in seven of the policies and programmes. For instance, the Youth Data Hub states that its aim is to partner with the private sector to collect data on youth and inform youth policies. As it states, “[we] gather youth-centric data and statistics to aid future policy creation, and decision making” (Federal Youth Authority, 2022a).

While “evidence” is often used as the rationale behind the aims of the seven policies, information on the underlying logic of what counts as evidence and how this will be collected is rarely straightforward. There is discrepancy between vision and reality regarding how programmes are meant to work. To further illustrate this, the policy websites do not indicate how the evidence gathered informs policymaking in practice. While the claims of data informed policies appear promising, what and how data are actually used to influence policies and whether the policies lead to the desired outcomes is unclear. The discrepancy between vision and reality was also seen in 12 of the 23 policies and programmes. The discrepancy is more apparent in policies and programmes managed by the FYA. As the ones managed by partner entities seem to be more rigorously institutionalised to achieve the vision and goals outlined. For example, the Youth 101 programme aims “to educate and equip youth with knowledge and understanding of the most pressing and important issues of our time as well as the channels of access to our government and how it works” (Federal Youth Authority, 2022b). However,

⁵⁵ I conducted one focus group with male National Service recruits to understand their perceptions.

the model and implementation process to support the claim was not explained anywhere on the website, how are youth being practically educated and gaining knowledge of the most important issues if the scale is small and the approach is not outlined. The Youth 101 example overclaims the impact with not enough evidence to prove its effectiveness, especially since its design is very similar to 100 mentors where government officials speak on a stage to a large number of youth. Similar to 100 Mentors, the website merely showcases events that took place. Both examples promise impact without providing solid evidence of how “educating” and “equipping” are practically happening.

5.1.3 Government expectations of Emirati youth

From the government’s point of view, the youth “want” to serve their country, hold onto their Emirati identity, build the required skills and capabilities, and develop themselves. This idea is emphasised and re-emphasised in approximately 10 policies and programmes. For example, the *Fakhr* forum mentioned earlier expects young Emirati males to participate in the National Service willingly: “we all participate in the service of the country” (Federal Youth Authority, 2023a). Additionally, in the text message sent from Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi then and President of the UAE now, to the graduates of the National Service stated the following:

My sons and daughters, members and graduates of the national service, are the pride of the Emirates. Your dedication and sincerity in serving your country... is our pride. The leadership of the UAE and its loyal people... they see in you hope and the future. Serving your country is a pride for you and your family, and you are a pride for your country—Mohammed bin Zayed (Federal Youth Authority, 2023a).

There is also an expectation that Emirati youth will want to develop their skills and capabilities given the opportunities provided to them, whether it is the Emirates Youth Summer Academy, Emirates Programme for Young Delegates to the United Nations, Emirates Youth Professional School, Youth Launchpad, or a handful of other programmes limited in scale and in details regarding how they work or achieve results. Based on my analysis, the ways in which the programmes are designed, assessed, and evaluated raise doubts about whether this ideal is achievable. The document analysis revealed that the initiatives are insufficient to provide development opportunities. It also revealed that it is essential

to have sufficient demand and engagement for policies to work. This point was further explored by engaging with youth and understanding their perceptions of the government's offerings (see chapter 7).

Another assumption presented by the government is that young people want to retain a solid Emirati identity. This is illustrated through some of the policies and programmes either celebrating youth as the nation's pride or expecting the youth to want to represent the UAE on different platforms. For instance, looking again at the Emirates Youth Global Initiative, which was launched to “showcase the global reality and perception of Emirati Youth to its truest identity: Will Powered Youth and Determined-Youth” (Federal Youth Authority, 2023b, para.02), it can be said that it targets young Emiratis living in the UK who gathered in a forum hosting government ministers and officials. The communicated messages were focused on the importance of being “ambassadors” of the country abroad—specifically, “the UAE make an extensive investment in Youth as its greatest change agents and strongest citizen diplomats” (Federal Youth Authority, 2023b, para.01).

My research assumes that ideas shape and structure individuals, their choices, and how they value specific actions. Ideas also influence policies, and policies can be used to instil specific ideas. This predominantly depends on how ideas are introduced and communicated and for what purposes. The document analysis highlighted and identified how the UAE strategically uses policies and programmes to emphasise certain ideas and values among young Emiratis.

5.2 Institutions

As discussed in the literature review chapter, institutions are defined as structures, rules, jurisdictions, policy legacies, and networks (Gauvin, 2014; Peters, 2012; Hall, 1997). The UAE's federal system offers significant autonomy to the various local authorities in designing their policies and programmes. Nevertheless, and since the FYA falls under the authority of the federal government, policies and programmes must obtain certain approvals both at the federal and local level. In my analysis, it is important to note that the government has effectively institutionalised the youth sector by creating a federal entity and appointing a cabinet minister for youth. Institutionalisation can be understood when a set of activities becomes instrumental and a formal process is followed in an organised manner (Kuchenmüller et al., 2022). However, the question of how the youth initiatives in

the UAE—whether policies or programmes—are practically institutionalised remains. Specifically, it is not clear where the related initiatives sit with respect to the oscillations in the scale of pre-institutionalisation and mature institutionalisation. Given that my research focuses on the factors influencing policy choices, I limited it to the pre-institutionalisation of the FYA policies and programmes rather than investigating the implementation phase. Kuchenmüller et al. (2022) explain the pre-institutionalisation step as the following:

In this phase, professional entrepreneurs and experts play an important role in shaping a new discourse and may be called upon to mobilise both material and immaterial assets. In general, the pre-institutionalisation phase refers to pragmatic legitimation (i.e., based on self-interest), and testing whether the new practices are seemingly working in a specific given context and begin to make sense. (p. 11)

In my analysis, I identify two main sub-themes (outlined below) under Hall's (1997) institutions lens. First, almost all the 23 documents analysed aim to strengthen the government-youth relationship; second, FYA initiatives are loosely defined; and third, initiatives run by FYA partners are clearly specified and structured. To date, it appears that policies and programmes vary in their formality and approval status depending on ownership—that is, there does not seem to be one systematic approach to institutionalising the 23 FYA policies and programmes.

5.2.1 Government-youth relationship

Analysis of the policies and programmes introduced by the FYA, revealed an intention to develop a well-institutionalised relationship between the UAE Government and the country's youth. The opportunities given exclusively to young Emiratis show the efforts designed to strengthen the bond and relationship between this group and government. This was visible in 16 out of the 23 policies and programmes analysed using Hall's 3I Framework:

1. Arab Youth Center
2. Done by Youth
3. Youth Policy

4. Emirates Youth Values National Programme
5. Youth Delegates Programme to the United Nations
6. Youth Councils
7. National Youth Dialogue
8. Youth Agenda
9. Youth Government Leaders Programme
10. Youth Hub
11. Youth Debates
12. Emirates Youth Summer Academy
13. Emirates Youth Global Initiative
14. Emirates Youth Professional School
15. Youth Launch Pad
16. Youth 101

For example, the Youth Retreat is an exclusive event between Emirati youth, government officials, and rulers. It is designed as a platform for the government to genuinely listen to a group of young people who represent their peers. The Youth Retreat’s website states that the Programme is “an important stage in the history of the UAE in activating, supporting, and empowering the youth of the Emirates” (Federal Youth Authority, 2017). Another example is the 100 Mentors programme, which allows youth to gain direct access to selected senior government officials, who share their journey through storytelling in a public event setting. The following is stated on the 100Mentors page (Federal Youth Authority, 2024b) website:

[The] 100 Mentors programme launched by the Federal Youth Authority aims to build national heroes across all fields in the UAE by establishing direct channels with mentors. The Mentors will work closely with the Federal Youth Authority to foster national heroes and harness the full potential of Emirati youth.

In the FYA initiatives, the government’s intention to create a strong relationship with young people was evident insofar as most programmes and policies were launched by rulers or government

officials. For instance, the Youth Circles programme was launched by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai. The programme states that its aim is to inspire youth-centric dialogue “to enable youth to express their opinions on societal issues and policy matters, and to catalyse community impact and youth leadership. Each Youth Circle seeks to answer one central question through action-oriented discussion and youth-inspired recommendations” (Federal Youth Authority, 2022c). The programme’s design shows that the government wants to listen to youth regardless of their expertise or capabilities to contribute to the discussion and add solid solutions. This does not necessarily mean developing youth skills, in this case, leadership skills as claimed in the aim of the programme.

Two examples under the Youth Policy are the Youth Board of Directors Policy, in which the “cabinet appointed 31 young Emiratis, from more than 3,300 applications, as board members of key federal government bodies” (Federal Youth Authority, 2024a, para.02); and the Youth Participation in Official Delegations Policy, where the cabinet approved a policy in which youth must be present in all UAE official delegations (Federal Youth Authority, 2024a). While these efforts are important for youth and in the creation of dialogue with policymakers through direct opportunities and access, they lack the mechanisms for youth development such as engaging youth in activities which practically and actively support them in building their competencies and skills rather than providing them with exposure opportunities only (Hamilton et al., 2004). Youth development requires individuals to be able to take responsibility in defining their challenges, finding solutions, acquiring knowledge, and improving themselves. Instead, the FYA’s initiatives highlight the UAE Government’s significant investment in strengthening the relationship with the youth. This raises the question of whether the FYA’s efforts are primarily to instil nationalistic values in the Emirati youth rather than to invest in youth human capital, their skills and capabilities to support the UAE’s economic vision. Based on the findings from the document analysis, my research will further explore these points in the Key Informants Interviews.

5.2.2 FYA initiatives: Loosely defined

The process of institutionalisation differs between the 23 policies and programmes, making it hard to understand the exact steps taken to design and structure the FYA initiatives. Although all youth-

related programmes and policies fall under the FYA purview, there is clear inconsistency in their administration, with some policies and programmes more rigorously institutionalised than others. Programmes managed directly by the FYA are loosely defined, with some websites only being partly developed and structured.

The aim of the Youth Circles programme, managed by the FYA in collaboration with hosting partners⁵⁶, is to gather data and recommendations through youth crowdsourcing ideas, skills, and talent to identify solutions for policies, receive direct feedback for policy ideas, send a direct message to the youth, and engage with the youth to understand their aspirations and opinions on different topics in order to enhance policymaking. However, this was not clear based on my documentary examination of the impact and outcomes of more than 300 Youth Circles, nor how the collected data and information were structured afterwards (Federal Youth Authority, 2022c). The website states that more than 100 Youth Councils have been formed, but it was unclear how the councils are institutionalised and governed⁵⁷. The website only revealed that public events such as sports competitions and Adobe illustrator workshops were organised by different councils, but there was no evidence on how the councils are achieving their stated vision—that is, “the Vision of the UAE Leadership is to empower Emirati youth to lead the world in every field and every international benchmark” (Federal Youth Authority, 2020).

Another prominent finding was how all the policies and programmes under the FYA are mostly government-led, with limited private sector involvement. Specifically, even when they involve private sector partners, their role seems to be restricted. For example, the Emirates Summer Youth Academy model brings experts and partners to deliver free workshops and training to interested youth. Nonetheless, the website does not state who chooses the content and how it is developed. Therefore, the role of experts and partners, and the extent of their autonomy, is unclear (Federal Youth Authority, 2023c).

⁵⁶ hosting partners refer to the entities who are hosting the youth circle session (e.g. Ministry of Economy doing a youth circle on entrepreneurship)

⁵⁷ The councils consist of small youth groups and include federal, local, private sector, and Emirati youth residing abroad.

The importance of building alliances at the regional and global level for the FYA was apparent in a few policies and programmes. The Arab Youth Center programme, for instance, provides an opportunity for the UAE Government to show its commitment to supporting the country's youth. Being endorsed by a UAE royal family member, the Center's website states a commitment to "empowering Arab youth by cooperating with Arab Governments and developing various policies and programmes to nurture the next generation" (Arab Youth Center, 2021). Furthermore, on a global level, the Emirates Youth Global Initiative claims to "showcase the global reality and perception of Emirati Youth to its truest identity: Will Powered Youth and Determined-Youth" (Federal Youth Authority, 2023b). It is not obvious from the website if the programme is meeting its goal and how it is practically institutionalised to deliver on that goal. The goal is focused on highlighting how the UAE is highly supportive in empowering active youth through institutionalising such programmes.

In a nutshell, applying Hall's (1997) institution lens to my document analysis illuminated how the policies and programmes predominantly focus on strengthening the UAE Government as the institution, solidifying its strategic position and political ties. Many of the policies and programmes were found to be ambitious in their claims and aims. Yet, the structures and processes facilitating their institutionalisation appeared to be missing, with no tangible results about their impact recorded.

5.2.3 Partner initiatives: Clearly specified

There are differences in institutionalisation based on who manages the FYA initiative. To illustrate, and based on my investigation of the Authority's website, initiatives institutionalised by partners other than the FYA are more clearly structured than ones organised internally in the FYA. The Mohammed bin Rashid International Center for Endowment Consultancy, for example, clearly describes its services, including its consultations services, training programmes, and licensing services (among others). Another example is the UAE Government Leaders Programme, with a straightforward detailed application process, responsibilities, and expectations described. Not only that, but there are programmes for Emiratis designed to accommodate varying career levels, such as the Executive Leaders Programme, Future Leaders Programme, UAE Youth Leaders Programme, and Capacity Building.

While the UAE Government Leaders Programme seems to have an explicit goal of building young nationals' leadership skills and capabilities, this is not the case for most of the programmes falling under the FYA umbrella. This theme of institutionalising programmes rigorously is missing in many of the FYA-led initiatives. It further raises questions on the design and institutionalisation of those policies and programmes and why do they differ between FYA-led initiatives and non-FYA-led initiatives. If the real goal is to develop youth skills be it leadership skills or other capabilities building skills, how are the programmes and policies help support this goal when the institutionalisation is not as strong? Why are the programmes and policies managed by FYA partners seem to be more strongly institutionalised? all of which will be further explored in the KII as I engage with policymakers and policy practitioners to understand the policymaking process.

5.3 Interests

Hall's (1997) interests lens, as discussed in Chapter 3, refers specifically to how different stakeholders influence policy decisions based on their motives—groups' and individuals' agendas and motivations can influence policies and choices in many ways. In the UAE, although public policymakers apparently introduce policies and programmes to benefit youth, there may be other undeclared interests behind their choices. Based on my analysis, three main interests influencing FYA policies and programmes were observed: government interests, youth interests, and economic interests. Before discussing each in more detail, it is worth noting that there is a fine line between interests and ideas. Specifically, my initial data analysis revealed that because specific interests incentivise the development of particular policies and programmes, by default, they instil and strengthen specific ideals and values which serve those interests. This is more so the case when the government is the ultimate decision-maker of which policies and programmes are selected. This analysis may be generalisable to countries who share similar profiles to the UAE, or may be unique to the UAE.

Youth influence is limited due to the government's authority in shaping the relevant policies and the overall passive political engagement of Emirati youth as a result of the social contract and non-democratic political system (see chapters 2 and 3). Notably, economic interests overlap and are interlinked with government interests and youth interests. The government's interests include

strengthening youth loyalty and Emirati identity, supporting political stability, and ensuring national stability. This means that the youth's contribution to the economy—via the entrepreneurship sector—benefits young people in terms of their own employment and livelihood but also benefits the economy by growing it. Economic growth is occurring without the need to increase public sector expenditure because new businesses, not the government, are now creating jobs.

The examples below reveal interests and incentives influencing and guiding policy choices directly and indirectly. The interests greatly impact how policies are developed according to whose interests are the most important to consider. For example, many of the policies and programmes may seem at first glance to be solely in the interest of UAE's youth. However, many of them are also focused on promoting governmental and economic interests. Hall's (1997) interests lens focuses on the role interest groups may have in influencing policy choices, and pertaining to the UAE (as discussed in Chapter 3), those interest groups could result in political instability in the future if not managed carefully through youth policies and programmes.

5.3.1 Government interests

The government's interests seem to sit at the heart of FYA policy choices. All 23 policies and programmes support the government's intention to strengthen youth loyalty, Emirati identity, political stability, and national security. For example, the 100 Mentors programme (Federal Youth Authority, 2024b) claims that it will “foster national heroes” (para.1) across all fields in the UAE by establishing direct channels with mentors, with the FYA selecting those mentors who will work with the youth. Although the messaging suggests its intention is to develop youth skills and capabilities, the logic is arguably flawed. The programme lacks clarity on how youth skills are developed in comparison to the widely recognised mentorship framework between the mentor and the protégé (Haggard et al., 2011). The 100 Mentors programme brings in senior government figures to share their stories of success by serving the country, which does not fit into the framework of an effective mentorship programme. Specifically, mentoring requires a certain level of commitment, intensity, and duration and is often delivered in a one-on-one format for the roles and responsibilities to be clarified to garner progress and achieve desirable, agreed-upon outcomes.

5.3.2 Youth interests

The website of the FYA (2024) states that it

...[c]ultivates the optimal ecosystem for all Youth to succeed in productive, healthy and character-focused lives. This is no small task; with 49% of the UAE's population under 35 and more than 60% of the MENA region under 30, the FYA aims to harness the energy, talents and ideas of the largest and most rapidly growing demographic.

Thus, policies and programmes under the entity should presumably predominantly serve the interests of the youth. This was easily identifiable in Youth Circles, where a select group of Emirati youth have the chance to sit with policymakers to discuss specific topics and “equal opportunity to express and share opinion to shape a solution or a policy” (Federal Youth Authority, 2022c). Similarly, the Youth Hub programme offers an open physical space for youth to work on their ideas and businesses across the seven Emirates. They can network with other young people and attend free workshops. It also offers the youth an opportunity to grow and develop themselves by using the hub's facilities (Federal Youth Authority, 2022d). These examples demonstrate that government efforts, to a certain extent, feed into the interests of youth in an organised manner. Nonetheless, youth interests are not as clearly served as the government's interests in the documents analysed, and this does not align with the vision and goals presented by the FYA. More specifically, at this level of analysis, how FYA initiatives are serving the development of youth and their interests is not apparent in terms of results.

5.3.3 Economic interests

Economic interests appeared in several programmes, with governmental emphasis placed on the importance of economic growth and its development (see Chapter 2). Three out of the 23 websites analysed show how economic interests influence youth initiatives: Flow Café, Done by Youth, and the Youth Launch Pad. It was found that all three focus on strengthening the entrepreneurship sector as they aim to encourage Emirati youth to start up and grow their businesses and highlight and celebrate their success. The details of how the support is provided and what it entails is, however, unclear. The recognition given to youth businesses is what is apparent from these initiatives. Additionally, the Done

by Youth programme aims to support youth by awarding them a Done by Youth stamp to place on their businesses for which there is a detailed criteria against which to apply on the programme's website. Interestingly, the programme can encourage entrepreneurship and support the sector's growth while instilling the idea of a supportive government: "Done by Youth is a mark of our passion, generosity, and eagerness to serve the country" (Federal Youth Authority, 2024c, para.01). So far, the interests lens seems to be crucial when analysing youth policy development in the UAE. The analysed policies and programmes show that at the core of the youth initiatives is the government's interests. This does not mean that youth interests are not important. However, they are not the ultimate influential factor on policy choices; they are secondary to the government's interests,

5.4 Conclusion

The examples shared in this chapter shed light on how youth are seen as an important human resource for the UAE Government, allowing for more opportunities for young nationals more than if there had been no entity focused on youth in terms of mandates, policies, and programmes. Institutionalising the youth sector brings the country one step closer to including youth in policy changes and strengthening the communication platforms offered to young Emiratis. This allows them direct access to UAE leadership and to share their challenges and concerns, which, in one way or the other, could affect decision-making around the policies and programmes being developed and introduced. However, the degree to which young people's opinions and experiences affect policymaking is not yet clear, nor is the effectiveness of such efforts in developing the youth cohort. The examples provided are clear reflections of youth engagement and empowerment, but are not necessarily examples of genuine youth development, as discussed in the next three chapters⁵⁸.

The document analysis of the 23 FYA youth policies and programmes (Table 11) indicates the government's intention to develop Emirati youth through empowering them, as will be discussed in the next three chapters⁵⁹. They further provide skills-building opportunities and support youth ideas and

⁵⁸ I expand on the discussion on the concepts of youth empowerment and youth development based on the findings from the interviews, focus groups with youth, and the discussion chapter.

⁵⁹ Jennings et al. (2006) define the key dimensions of critical *youth empowerment* as follows: (1) a welcoming, safe environment, (2) meaningful participation and engagement, (3) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical processes to affect change, and (6) integrated individual- and community-level empowerment. (p.41)

aspirations. Most of the policies and programmes, at first glance, seem to be developed solely in the interests of youth and to instil certain ideals and values in line with the framing of the policy or programme. However closer, critical examination of the FYA documents shows that most policies and programmes are designed to serve the government's interest and have been introduced to strengthen nationalistic and loyalty values among UAE's youth. It is harder to understand how the policy or programme can achieve its desired outcomes if youth development in terms of skills, knowledge, and capabilities is the ultimate goal⁶⁰. Preliminary findings from the document analysis suggested a deeper investigation and sourcing of the data were required to better understand how the 3I lenses in Hall's (1997) relate to the FYA policies and programmes. This led to a more comprehensive analysis of the key informant interviews, the findings of which are presented in the next chapter.

Hall's (1997) 3I framework facilitated the identification of a number of themes which be seen to support the government's claims, but many of these are not aligned with the definitions of development presented in this research, as discussed earlier. Depending on the ownership of a given programme or policy, the application of the 3I framework to the documents analysed in this research has highlighted and exposed the inconsistencies in how youth policies in the UAE are addressing, or failing to address, the challenges associated with youth development. Accordingly, the documents predominantly reveal the values and ideals the UAE Government wishes to instil in the country's young nationals, rather than being indicative of any systematic planning for youth development.

As to the application of Hall's (1997) 3I framework, this research concludes that interests and ideas are not always stated explicitly in policy texts, making further analysis necessary. Moreover, the FYA seems to have been created predominantly as an institution which serves the government's interests while seeking to strengthen the relationship between the UAE leaders and youth. The 3I framework proved helpful in guiding my document analysis and eliciting insights which prepared the ground for the key informant interviews. The document analysis signalled a possible gap in the policies and programmes in terms of them reaching their full potential and delivering on their claims given the

⁶⁰ Hamilton et al. (2004) define youth development in three different ways: the natural process of development, principles of development, and practices of development.

limited information on how they are institutionalised and the scarcity of results indicating their effectiveness. Hall's institutions lens was not always clear when used across the policies and programmes examined. During the analysis phase of this research, it was sometimes difficult to observe and understand the mechanisms through which the institutions operated. In other cases, *institution* is loosely defined. This insight has been explored in the key informant interviews and focus groups.

The document analysis highlighted possible shortcomings in stakeholders' roles in achieving better policy outcomes which support the government and youth as the primary targets. This included subject-matter experts in designing programmes with rigorous execution plans, such as 100 Mentors. That being said, the FYA could use more structured methods to develop and introduce policies to influence youth behaviour and implement programmes more rigorously to support youth development. The weaknesses identified may be attitudinal or social based on young people's mindsets, which subsequently influence their engagement with those policies and programmes, as well as how policymakers choose and assess government efforts and for what purposes. Lastly, the strong relationship desired between the UAE Government and youth appears in and overlaps between the ideas and interest lenses. Exploring this through the data collected in the key informant interviews and focus groups (see chapters 6 and 7) has facilitated deeper and more holistic understandings about, and illumination of, the complexity inherent in policymaking. Identifying research participants' perceptions about what influences youth policy development can help to generate insights towards strengthening future policy development.

While the FYA model may not be ideal, it is nevertheless a model which has the potential to improve engagement among youth, connecting them with the leadership in the UAE and serving as a platform for the youth to voice their grievances and aspirations. These issues have been investigated further in the key informant interviews, the findings of which are outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Key Informant Interview Findings

The previous chapter presented the findings from the textual analysis of FYA policies and programmes for youth. As a second step, and as explained earlier, the next method of inquiry was to interview relevant stakeholders within the UAE youth sector using Hall's (1997) 3I framework. The sample selection followed selection criteria, as discussed in Chapter Four. Here, I present the narratives, themes, and findings from these key informant interviews, addressing the first and third main research questions and complementing the findings from the document analysis. The interviews with key informants from the UAE Government shed light on the perceptions policymakers and policy practitioners share about Emirati youth, the expectations they have, and the process each participant experiences as they make a decision or implement an approved policy or programme.

6.1 Ideas

Within Hall's (1997) ideas lens, the data from the KII revealed three main themes. First, *youth empowerment* was used interchangeably with *youth development*. Second, the UAE Government's values and vision highly influenced policy choices. Third, key informants' definition of *challenges* influenced the policymaking process. The most consistent theme which emerged is that the interviewees answered the questions related to youth development with examples of youth empowerment and youth engagement. Although the wider literature differentiates these terms of youth development and youth empowerment, interviewees used them interchangeably. Hamilton et al. (2004) recognised three different meanings for the term of youth development: 1) The natural process of development, 2) principles of development; and 3) practices of development. Whilst the natural process of development is seen as continuous rather than as a goal to attain, policy choices relate to other conceptualisations of youth development. Policy choices shape the environment and specific policies and programmes which could help youth develop their skills and knowledge. Adapted from Jennings et al. (2006) work, youth empowerment could be defined as a multiple levels approach which includes practical tools, social action steps, and individual and collective outcomes with the purpose of *including* youth in decision-making and not developing them *per se* (Jennings et al., 2006). Jennings et al., explain the key dimensions for critical youth empowerment are, "1) a welcoming and safe environment, 2) meaningful

participation and engagement, 3) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, 4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes 5) participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change, and 6) integrated individual- and community-level empowerment” (2006, p.41). Some of these dimensions could apply to the UAE while others are not applicable. To exemplify, offering a welcoming and safe environment to nurture youth engagement, and allowing meaningful participation and engagement in the labour market is empowering economically. I further discuss these points in Chapter 8.

6.1.1 Youth empowerment efforts justified by youth development examples

During my interviews with policymakers and policy practitioners to understand the UAE’s efforts to develop youth, I gave a brief background about my research stating that, “In line with the UAE’s vision to continuously invest in its youth, build their skills and empower them to become more active in contributing to the development of the country, I am pursuing a PhD focusing on Emirati youth education and career choices” (see appendix 3). The purpose of my interviews is to understand aspects of youth development in terms of their skills and capabilities and how this is carried out. The interviewees, however, continued to emphasise the idea of youth empowerment in their responses rather than development. This was problematic since the efforts described as aimed at youth empowerment do not align with the wider understandings of youth development and are limited, as I will discuss here. This suggests a gap in understanding and awareness of the differences between the two terminologies, which is then translated into policy changes and choices which do not effectively develop youth skills and capabilities towards achieving the government’s knowledge economy goals. For instance, one of the questions posed in the interviews was: “In your opinion, what makes a successful inspirational Emirati story for youth development?” To which most participants gave examples of how the UAE engages its youth in policy choices and provides them with platforms to share their thoughts and ideas. Policy practitioner 2 reflected on the government’s efforts by mentioning how engaging with the youth is sufficient to empower them and, in return, they are *expected to serve the UAE*:

Seeing visually how young people can contribute to the overall purpose of serving the nation—no, I can’t see a single young person who would have an excuse that he didn’t get the

opportunity to serve the nation, or he don't know how he could serve the nation. Because there are hundreds and 1000s of choices, ideas, channels, programmes the Federal Youth Authority have offered with its partners to empower young people and to have the channel of serving the nation or joining forces to build the nation and the future of this nation.

This example resonates with external factors that are seen as empowering in community-wide initiatives to develop young people (Hamilton et al. 2004):

7. Community Values Youth – Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth
8. Youth as Resources – Young people are given useful roles in the community
9. Service to Others – Young person serves as in the community one hour or more per week (p.13)
10. Safety – Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

A similar point was made by policymaker 3:

The focus is huge now on youth, and empowering youth specifically in all sectors is very big. The request from us is to empower youth in the different sectors across, whether its education, labour market, health, Emiratisation, even family independence, financial independence et cetera. We are required to support them in all stages. The government see the youth as the most valuable resource. We need to benefit from this resource as a government since this youth resource is what will drive the UAE in the next 50 years.

Questions remain given the contradictory goals in these different visions. These interviewees mentioned the importance of youth moving to the private sector and emphasised the importance of serving the country. Whether they came from the FYA, MoE, MoHRE, or *NAFIS*, the policymakers and policy practitioners highlighted that youth are the most valuable resource for the government and their economic empowerment is at the top of the leadership's policy agenda. The interviewees consistently claimed that providing opportunities to young Emiratis is important for youth empowerment and engagement . However, the research questions how those efforts could stand up to critical scrutiny in

terms of *how* the designed policies and programmes can lead to youth development. Some of the interviewees backed up their points by exemplifying rulers' speeches and videos on social media, as well as and ministers' public events in which they speak directly to the youth. Such speeches and social media messages are designed to motivate the youth to work hard and give back to the country for it to grow its economy and to develop. Here, again, the national interest (i.e., government interest) is visible.

One example referenced in the interviews is the 100 Mentors programme, which is problematic because the approach to youth development was not clearly explained by the key informants, nor does it meet the core characteristics of mentoring. That being said, there are a few programmes under the FYA which do target youth development, such as the Young Economist Programme and Youth Debates. These were not referenced by the interviewees and cannot be scaled to the entirety of the youth segment, even though the FYA website states that the UAE's goal is to prepare Emirati youth for the future by helping them acquire the right skills and capabilities to compete in an evolving labour market.

To conclude, key informants seem to want to develop young people to better contribute to a changing economy through emphasising on the importance of STEM skills to meet the government's vision, which aligns with the vision of a knowledge economy. However, at the same time, the examples of supporting evidence they use were almost all showing selective youth empowerment rather than youth development. Nonetheless, it is important to note that for genuine youth development, the FYA policies and programmes remain unscalable. Thus, if youth make up half of the Emirati population and are the future of the country, scaling up the programmes and policies and ensuring they suit the scrutiny of the youth development definition is highly critical.

6.1.2 UAE government's aspirations and political interests highly influence policy choices

The values of citizenship, loyalty, and serving the country were highly celebrated and emphasised during the interviews. These values influence the policy choices and programmes the government introduces and implements. From the document analysis, examples from *Fakhr*, a programme which celebrates National Service recruits, and the Emirati Youth Values National Programme, which aims to instil the above values, were discussed. The emphasis on youth upholding the values of the country also impacts the policymaking for youth and affects how youth make their

choices in terms of education and employment. For example, Emirati youth may continue to seek public sector employment with the intention to serve the country and be *good citizens*, which partly serves the government's interests in preserving the values mentioned but does serve youth interests by preparing them for the future and truly empowering them. This was emphasised by all interviewed policymakers. As one key informant stated, "...and our value is how can we ensure that we are able to shape and nourish Emirati character through instilling values and national pride, raising awareness and equipping them with the capabilities and competencies to thrive" (policymaker 1).

Moreover, other key informants continued to emphasise the importance of holding a strong national identity through different efforts, exemplifying the Ministry of Culture and Youth programmes to enrich the national cultural values:

Emiratisation and national identity now are very important. How youth represent the country inside and outside the country; the way they carry themselves; their identity, their values, all of these are things, we focus on them. I am sure you see how social media is becoming now. The Emirati identity is very important now. We are being culturally invaded, not only we but other societies, too, suffer from that. Therefore, we have to emphasise the positive Emirati identity. They build the reputation of the country. (policymaker 5)

It is good for the leadership to understand where youth stand on nationalism values. [...]we always have to come up with different initiatives to instil the values in youth through the youth hubs of our youth councils. We keep on coming up with ideas to instil, and values build values. Okay, in addition to that, the MOCY continuously work on different programmes, whether in schools or in hubs, things that are related to Emirati culture and Emirati values. (policymaker 4)

Beside the nationalism values and Emirati identity mentioned by the interviewees, there was also the matter of the alignment of youth with the UAE's vision. In parallel, there seemed to be sub-visions which interviewees shared based on their professional experiences, responsibilities, and individual agendas. To illustrate, the answers to the question, "*Tell me about the UAE's vision and aspirations for Emirati youth*", varied substantially. For example, policymaker 1 stated the following, "a nation of

future-ready youth who realise their full potential and embody the best of UAE character”. Policymaker 5 stated the following, “Also today I want graduates who are not only technical, but they have multi-skills, engineering with financial skills—having the financial acumen helps in terms of not only thinking about this one thing but also the bigger impact”. Meanwhile policymaker 2 observed:

Well, a vision is a vision. It’s not only about why, but it’s about how specific do you want to be? How narrow you want it to be? So, if I say today that my focus is STEM, that’s the Vision, right? This has a ripple effect in everything I do. [.....] and therefore, to answer your question, this time, we’re saying no, we need to perfectly and in a structured manner define Vision, get it endorsed by cabinet. That will be the Vision that will be the North Star, and then everything else will follow. So, now we’re looking into not being purely STEM, but being more inclusive, and also being able to allow each student to succeed in their own way. Be it STEM, be it liberal arts, or whatever it may be.

It is therefore unclear how effective or ineffective it is to have sub-visions for the same youth segment, how tangible or intangible a vision should be, how to assess success and outcomes, and how often a vision should be revised or changed. Policymaker 4 also gave an answer to the vision question that was unclear in terms of the tangibility to achieve results, especially by saying “to be skilled and upskilled”. Does it mean STEM majors, engineering, or which fields? He described the UAE’s vision in the following way: “the vision is to be the best youth in the world in everything, in terms of education, in terms of health, to run the country in the future, to be skilled and upskilled. The Vision is for youth to be the best in the world”. Stating that the vision is for youth to be the best in the world or the best in everything is too abstract. One clear definition for “best” is unattainable, as this concept is too subjective and complex to measure.

In summary, the comments presented above from the informants clearly demonstrate the consistent theme of serving the country and contributing to the government’s vision, but they also demonstrate differences in respondents’ definitions of vision. This signals a possible challenge in effectively achieving the goal for youth. It is unclear how tangible the vision is, how it can be measured, and how aligned stakeholders are in their attempts to reach the desired outcomes.

6.1.3 Policymakers' perceptions and definitions of challenges

The key informant interviews explored how respondents understand and define governance challenges and youth challenges from the government's perspective. The interviewees used their perceptions of challenges and experiences as evidence supporting their policy choices. One of the policymakers highlighted the sense of entitlement as one of the challenges faced. He explained how young people seem to continue to expect things to stay the same, especially when their parents and grandparents have benefited from the existing social contract. For example, policymaker 2 stated:

I think one of the things that we suffer from is that we guarantee free education, K-12, and higher education. So, there's a sense of entitlement [part of the social contract] and a sense that I have a pathway that I have to go through. It's a given right, yes, but there isn't that much of hunger except we're talking about going to top institutions globally. I'd like for students to become more invested in developing themselves. I don't want to take away the comfort of having that education as a privilege. But I think I'd love to have them have a bit more grit, a bit more self-investment, and really look at their own development as something as beneficial to them as a person that they need to take care of.

The challenges related to youth entitlement came up multiple times throughout in approximately half of the interviews. Youth entitlement is an expression of rentier mentality. To explain, when policy makers and policy practitioners highlight attitudes of entitlement and requiring young Emiratis to behave differently, this means that they feel youth expectations and mindsets need to change. The entitlement comes from young people's expectations of the government (see chapter 3). Policy practitioner 3 addressed the youth entitlement matter saying:

I feel the sense of entitlement needs to be changed. There's that sense of entitlement that the government should provide you with everything [and it] needs to be changed. It's not easy at all and we always discuss this and how to do it, but it's going to be a tough journey you need to reach and accomplish.

Some interviewees continued to emphasise the importance of changing the entitlement mindset and creating more self-motivated individuals, all the while ensuring that they continue to fit within the institutional structure of the UAE.

Besides youth mindsets, other main government challenges focused on the limited financial resources, human resources, and coordination across entities. For example, four out of the ten interviewees who come from the same sector explained how youth pursue many milestones in their journey, and that the direction and guidance given are not always visible. As explained, approximately half the national population falls under the UAE's defined youth segment—15–35 years old⁶¹. And, so, a 20-year journey for one young Emirati differs from another, being exposed to different opportunities, facing geographical limitations, and experiencing different pressures from family and societal networks (among others). What stood out throughout the interviews is the idea that youth are not being well mentored, more so in their education and career choices. It was not explained, however, how much the government wants youth to be guided and how much they want youth to be self-guided. This research interprets from the findings here that the lack of clarity in guidance may have resulted in missed opportunities, wasting the potential of this majority segment. The following quotations are illustrative of the key informant interviewees' perceptions of the challenges they endure when choosing and designing policies and programmes, reflecting as well on the challenges the youth face in the transition process (i.e., top-down approach). As policy practitioner 1 explained:

Now in terms of choices, it depends on so many factors that limit the choices that young people can go for. There are other pressures because, for example, they don't know what they want to go for: the families influence, the lifestyle of the person himself. By this I mean, youth maybe in suburban areas. For example, when they reach 18, they have so many challenges in his way, going through the National Service, moving to another city like in dorms or something—it's life changing because some might choose to work instead of continuing their education.

Additionally, as policymaker 4 pointed out:

So, for example, we saw the youth graduating from their high school. The first challenge that they face is what major I choose for my bachelor. And then once he got into it, how can I get employed with the government sector or private sector? How can I prepare myself for the

⁶¹ When asked about the reason behind choosing 15–35 as the youth age group, policymakers explained this as a leadership decision. No other reason behind the definition was provided.

interview? And then we have the National Service. How can the youth benefit from this? How can he get employed, marriage level, housing et cetera? So, each level has, as I mentioned, its own challenges.

To summarise, the interviews revealed that the ideas lens is the most influential in guiding the policymaking approach in the UAE. This could be explained by the relationship that rulers and citizens have, or the social contract, and the political structure of the UAE. While youth development may be used to explain the government's focus on young people, does the lack of effective measures which would lead to youth development undermine the approach? The UAE's values of loyalty, nationalism, and Emirati identity, nonetheless, are visible in the data examined and through efforts to strengthen the relationship between the government and the youth. In the next section, I discuss the institutions lens and how it has influenced policy choices based on the KII findings.

6.2 Institutions

The interviews highlighted three main themes (discussed in turn below) under the institution lens. First, evidence for the government's approach to structuring policymaking was gleaned from the interviews based on participants' positions and expertise. The second relates to the institutionalisation of the mindset shift. The government designed different policies and programmes focusing on instilling and strengthening certain ideals among young Emiratis which may contradict the empowerment efforts. The third theme can be characterised as multiple efforts and minimal tangible outcomes. Most of the interviewees only vaguely answered questions related to impact and results, with reference to KPIs but without sharing details or specific outcomes which demonstrate effectiveness.

6.2.1 Government's approach to structuring policymaking

The institutionalisation of the youth sector and attempts to empower and engage youth in policymaking differ from how it used to be before the institutionalising of the youth sector. As shown in the document analysis chapter, the government is providing a range of platforms for youth to voice their concerns and engage them in decision-making. For example, the UAE Government chose individuals to take part in the Youth Retreat. Similarly, the Youth Councils programme was found to be problematic as, rather than being inclusive of the broader population, the youth segment being heard

is the same as that connected with the FYA. Ultimately, the FYA decides who represents the voice of the youth rather than youth nominating and choosing their representatives. Such selectivity raises questions about the nature and extent of youth representation and engagement in policymaking. One of the key informants described the process of consultation with young people in policymaking as follows:

It's our modus operandi, which is done by youth model, but it's under the General Secretary of the cabinet, and it's a policy analysis implemented. So, basically, the Ministry of Climate Change proposed a policy or their strategy. They have to check the box if they've consulted with youth, and how did they listen to them? Did they have a youth circle or consulted the youth councils? They have a playbook that is created by FYA that says these are the ways to listen to youth [...]. And it is important that they understand that engagement is understanding engagement of youth is informed action, engagement of youth is routine. (Policymaker 1)

Another informant highlighted the government's engagement efforts via the number of programmes and how they are intended to work:

We have built several models to engage youth to hear their voices in everything. It was based on our youth councils at every level in the country. It was through youth circles to discuss every topic that they can think of, to lead decision-making in the country and make the voice of youth matter in all these topics... [...] And recently as well, we changed a bit, the mandate of the Emirates Youth Council, which is at the cabinet level, to be involved in the policy review, to review any policy that comes out of ministries and to the cabinet. (Policy practitioner 2)

The efforts involving youth in every process seem promising and powerful. Nevertheless, it is unclear how the majority of the youth segment is represented. The interviews did not address how the voices of those with no access to certain platforms, who are unemployed, or who face other restrictive challenges are incorporated into the policymaking process⁶². Including all segments of youth is important to ensure

⁶² I did not ask direct questions about disadvantaged youth. However, since the key informant interviews were semi-structured, I asked the interviewees to walk me through the policy process, and there was no mention on how the programmes are designed to include all youth segments.

inclusive policymaking and to create youth-informed policies. Young Emiratis who are already active will most likely find a way to vocalise their opinions and propose ideas, but other youth voices are missing from the conversation. The government-organised youth participation could make it difficult for youth to speak out and advocate for their ideas and policy changes to better align with the government's vision to develop, empower, and engage them. Therefore, it was essential in this research to understand from the youth how they perceive the government's efforts (see chapter 7 for findings from focus groups).

6.2.2 The institutionalisation of the mindset shift

The analysis of the interview data revealed a unified government voice in emphasising the idea of youth being the most critical resource for the UAE—that is, the government's trust in its youth and the role they are expected to play in giving back to the country. This was evident in most of the conversations with both policymakers and policy practitioners. For example, policymaker 1 observed: “So, what are we saying here? We're saying it is no longer sufficient to see youth as anything less than our most valuable assets and address their needs in every part of their life”. Another informant shared:

So, this is why our Ministry of Youth exists. And that's why the mandate is based on two fundamental points: 1) youth are the future, and 2) the government must be directly involved. And we can't afford to build the future that eliminates half of our population from contributing their voice, their talent, their energy, their ideas. (Policy practitioner 1)

A third Key Informant asserted:

We have youth who are willing to give back to the community. Our culture is different; our culture something we like to get back to. We love our country, and we are trying to do whatever is needed to give back. (Policy practitioner 2)

The theme illustrated above is interesting in the way it highlights how ideas influence institutions in the UAE's context. The strategic approach taken by the government through its initiatives to influence youth mindsets and strengthen related structural institutions to instil certain ideals is clear. As policy practitioner 1 highlighted (above), the government must be involved, and youth are the future.

This indicates a possible intention in strengthening the government-youth relationship while instilling nationalistic and loyalty values which serve the UAE. The process of shaping young Emiratis' mindsets could be effective in strengthening the relationship between the rulers and the country's citizens. It may, however, weaken the empowerment efforts which key informants emphasised and re-emphasised through the conversations. Since its formation, the UAE has had an implicit social contract between its citizens and the leadership. Any step that could affect the welfare and socioeconomic status of Emirati people is rigorously studied and is approached gradually and carefully. Through institutionalisation of the youth sector, Emirati youth are expected to feel empowered and more independent without necessarily being empowered and independent; it seems like a government's vision paradox to find a balance between the two while further strengthening the institutional structures surrounding them. Hence, there exists complexity in balancing things out politically whilst achieving effective outcomes and strategic empowerment.

A good example here is the active approach of the government to the nationalisation of jobs, which according to Hertog (2020), proved ineffective in the Gulf, as discussed in Chapter 2⁶³. One possible reason for this is the strong relationship the government has with its people and the impact it has on their perceptions of available employment opportunities. Encouraged by the norms and environments within which they have been raised, and via the empowerment policies and programmes, young people may be keener on serving the government in the public sector than pursuing jobs in the private sector which will be further explored in the next chapter. Now, when facing the demise of an oil economy, this is not what the UAE Government wants.

6.2.3 Multiple efforts, minimal tangible outcomes

The key informant interviews included questions focused on evaluation, the assessment of effectiveness, engagement with youth policies and programmes, and outcomes. The purpose was to better understand the tools used to measure effectiveness and results from the efforts dedicated to youth. The interviews did not reveal any evaluations of the 23 policies and programmes under the FYA. The

⁶³ Nationalisation is a government policy aimed at mandating private sector employers to hire Emiratis by applying quotas and fines.

answers were vague, focusing on policymakers' perceptions of effectiveness. The following quote from policy practitioner 4 is illustrative of this:

We take the partner or the stakeholder evaluation, we take it to our departments. We know that a person who is working on the youth hub has a good idea for my project. So, sometimes we work with them as well to evaluate what we are doing. And I wish you can join the leadership meeting to see how we criticise. So, we usually—if you want to focus on an initiative—we make the whole department work on it.

The *NAFIS* programme was found to be the exception as there have been trackable results in terms of employment numbers in the private sector, supported by a government dedicated fund to support Emirati youth and address unemployment challenges. The same cannot be said of FYA efforts. It was apparent from the interviews that there are multiple governance models involved which could hinder the policy and programme implementation process. Without mentioning any statistics, some informants stated they do follow certain KPIs. They explained that the UAE's General Secretariat of the Cabinet⁶⁴ is the primary entity responsible for following up on KPIs.

Policy practitioner 2 confirmed this by stating: “The cabinet makes sure you revise all policies after five years from its launch. So, the cabinet makes sure the policies are effective or not”. Further, policy practitioner 4 stated: “First when, when we start developing a policy, what we do is we set KPIs for it and the KPIs are approved and followed up on through the cabinet or through PMO depending on the KPI”. Another key informant answered this question by explaining that the Emirates Youth Council reports to the Cabinet: “We currently have around 100 youth councils and the overarching one is the Emirates Youth Council, which reports directly to the cabinet” (policy practitioner 3). This does not necessarily answer the question as it is subjective reporting rather than an objective measure of effectiveness and results.

Interestingly, the data showed that the FYA is not the entity which measures the effectiveness of its efforts despite it being responsible for youth affairs. It is not obvious how much control the FYA

⁶⁴An external entity which is not part of the FYA but overlooks all ministries and ministerial files.

has over implementing programmes and policies or over measuring the effectiveness of these. If the UAE's General Secretariat of the Cabinet follows up on the delivery and outcomes of the policies and programmes, the definition of success and effectiveness is unclear. In such a case, having a multi-level governance model is often criticised in public policy studies as it raises questions regarding fragmentation, dichotomy, a lack of capacity, a lack of quality control, and unpredictability in outcomes (Bache & Flinders, 2004), especially since entities define success differently. Thus, collaboration between stakeholders could be compromised. These assumptions were explored further by engaging with youth and determining how, if at all, the efforts resonate with them (see Chapter 6).

Two key informants explained the challenges they face because of external stakeholders who are not cooperating as required for policy changes to take place. For example, policy practitioner 1 shared issues on coordination challenges, as follows:

The coordination with the different entities is one of the big challenges in terms of implementing it in a certain emirate, or how coordinating with private, semi-government, or local government or federal. This is one of the biggest challenges I face in my daily work.

Another key informant explained similar challenges when trying to work with other entities, as follows:

Sometimes we have policy ideas, but the entities responsible to implement the policy restrict you because we deal with youth. So, maybe, for example, the policy is related to a [specific ministry] which is the responsible entity to make the final decision. They can choose to reject it and not allow it to proceed. This is one of the main disablers for policymakers. There is a huge difference between being a local versus a federal entity in your ability to implement.
(policy practitioner 4)

The previous examples capture some of the policymaking issues when it comes to coordinating with multiple entities to maximise effectiveness, to create a seamless transition from policymaking to policy implementation, and to help support the success and effectiveness of federal government efforts. One of the reasons key informants may have struggled to share success stories regarding youth policies and

programmes stems from the fact that those policies and programmes fall under the purview of the FYA without their outcomes being measured by the FYA. The institutionalisation efforts vary in their approach and between policies and programmes and require further investigation to assess their effectiveness and to analyse the whole process from pre-institutionalisation to implementation. The conversations with the different policymakers and policy practitioners highlighted those challenges in translating the visions into reality, institutionalising the process, and implementation issues that affect outcomes. The next section discusses the role different interests play in influencing policy choices.

6.3 Interests

Interests are highly influential in terms of the experiences and perceptions outlined by the key informants and, thus, how they guide their choices. The following sections outline and discuss the interdependent relationship between the lenses of interests and ideas, how it might reflect, and its relevance for policymaking for youth in the UAE. Either way, my findings indicate that interests are, for the most part, politically driven in order to avoid the political instability that might arise from youth being dissatisfied, disengaged, and marginalised. Upon examination of the key informant interview data, two themes emerged. First, the primary interests influencing policy choices for youth and incorporating their interests into policymaking are national and general interests (i.e., government interests). Second, and because of the consequences each policy or programme choice may have, interests play an essential role in how policies are formulated. Questions were asked during the interviews in relation to the main decision-makers, the main stakeholders, and youth's role in influencing the policies and programmes.

6.3.1 National and general interests highly influencing policy decisions

The analysis revealed that government interests are at the heart of policymaking. To some extent, this could include youth interests as part of the UAE's national agenda and its future 2071 vision. The following extract from the interview with policy maker 1 shows how the UAE's national agenda drives many of the choices for youth-related policies and programmes:

... [i]t's the general interest of accomplishing our national agenda. So, we do have the UAE 2071 vision. And then we do have national agendas. We have strategies across sectors. And we

have the National Youth agenda and young people's input when it comes to the aspirations and challenges fully aligned. So, basically, it's all somehow plugged in together and aligned together where, when you move the dial in every single piece, it affects the whole picture.

Policy practitioner 2 also made the connection between empowering the youth with the national interest (i.e., government interests) which is paradoxical as he states the importance of empowering them, while at the same time, strengthening youth trust in the government to make decisions on their behalf:

I think naturally it's the national interest. Right, as a nation, to strive for a nation with a big proportion of youth, you need to ensure you empower them. You need to ensure that the youth trust decisions being made. So, I think if you say, whose interest beyond youth, I think it's also the government that the nation as a whole, right? Because the demographics themselves speak for themselves and it's predominantly youth. And, therefore, as government, you have to have them. You have to make it more inclusive because youth play a significant role in the government.

This theme was illustrated in all conversations with the key informants and aligns with the findings of the document analysis. Through using Hall's (1997) interests lens, this research investigated the interviewees' perceptions in terms of how and whose interests influence policy choices and guide them. With the UAE's political structure in mind, it is expected to have the national interest as the overarching theme in pursuing youth-related policies and programmes, with youth participation being limited in scale. This is more the case given how vital the youth segment is and that youth interests are expected to be proactively managed and organised to safeguard the government's interests. This was discussed earlier in the document analysis section and is mentioned by policy practitioner 2 here:

I am talking based on facts and numbers and results; the youth councils are in every Emirate. Every two years high-level official announces officially who are the youth councils' members every two years. How much confidence are you giving to those youth? Also, I have been in the committee to choose the youth members for the councils.

Policy practitioner 2 elaborated further:

Youth today have so many more opportunities. Today is much more, the upcoming opportunities are much more, and the participation is even better than ever. Also, in addition, a while ago, I worked on a workshop. When I keep going to the work that we have done before and when I compare it to international models, I want to be honest in comparison to all those international models, what we do here is much, much more than those models. I ended up using the FYA module.

Despite efforts, the FYA model still seems selective and top-down in its inclusion of youth, which aligns with the overarching national interest theme, hence government interests. It must be noted here that I cannot conclude that a selective approach to youth inclusion has a distorting effect on youth policy choices and formation as this is not the focus of my research. However, this point was explored further in the focus groups with the youth, comparing how young nationals coming from different areas and backgrounds perceive the policies and programmes and engage with them⁶⁵ (see Chapter 6).

6.3.2 Youth interests are selectively incorporated into policy decisions

With the government's interests in mind, my findings suggest that youth are playing a more active role than prior to the establishment of the FYA in policy decisions and contributing evidence to inform policymaking, despite the selectivity of the process. Involving youth in policymaking in the UAE is recent, as explained earlier. Policy practitioner 4 contextualises the situation of youth before the establishment of the FYA in 2016, as follows:

There is a lot of difference. In terms of the changes, the previous era was focused on providing programmes through the Centers to support building the capabilities of youth, and the focus was more on sports given that it was under the sports authority. Today, we are talking about a whole journey for youth from 15–35, learning about each stage, filling the gaps—it is much more holistic.

⁶⁵ For the recruitment of the focus groups, as discussed in the previous chapter, I ensured that the research tapped into the segments of youth in suburban areas, cities, and those studying abroad to include their diverse experiences and opinions.

Policymaker 1 discusses the same point, explaining how the government has set a vision for youth and developing these skills and capabilities:

The UAE distinguished youth and sports, and this is especially admirable because youth has always been conventionally housed with sports. It's an outdated practice and mindset, especially in this century. Without a doubt, sport positively impacts youth health, youth education and youth social development in fostering their community, their country, and their industry. But what makes the best Emirati? Developing people's well-rounded capabilities is one, and developing their well-rounded aspirations to reach their full potential to reach their best-suited careers that are their healthiest minds, mental health care, their healthiest bodies, their healthiest spirits, their top values as citizens, their true purpose as human beings.

The key informant data indicate that the recent institutionalisation of the youth sector does not only serve government interests but is also beneficial for young Emiratis in terms of exposure to opportunities which allow them to engage with the government and contribute to the policymaking process, as well as to voice their concerns through utilising the FYA platforms. So, from the perspective of my KIs, youth interests, to a certain extent, influence policymaking. The following extract from policy practitioner 3 illustrates this point:

Youth are a major part in all active sectors in the UAE. Developing policies and programmes, the FYA ensures that it develops a place for youth to share their thoughts and suggest ideas, whether it's through the youth circles or the youth debates. The suggestions and opinions are used to develop policies and programmes even if not direct.

Not only that, but policy practitioner 5's example highlights the UAE's efforts to further empower youth to leadership positions whether in the private or public sector:

I would say there are many things that have happened and started happening that are helping in showing how the UAE is empowering youth. The number of ministers that are from the youth segment, putting them in leadership positions. This is an achievement that never existed before. Previously, high positions were restricted and limited to those with experience, years of

experience, et cetera. Today, we see youth in ministerial positions. This, on its own, is an achievement.

Additionally, policy maker 5 explained their goal: “Today, the UAE and its leaders want to empower and develop young Emirati to get into the private sector”. While the government’s aspirations and support for youth and their potential is evident from all the interview responses, they lack insight into what impact the policies and programmes have on changing youth perceptions about the private sector and development in their skills and capabilities to compete in the private sector.

This theme has been apparent throughout the interviews. For example, policy practitioner 1 said:

The focus is huge now on youth and empowering youth specifically in all sectors is very big. the request from us is to empower youth in the different sectors. Whether it’s education, labour market, health, Emiratisation, even the family independence, the financial independence., etc. we are required to support them in all stages.

This raises the question of how the government efforts are practically and effectively developing youth skills and capabilities to deserve senior positions in their careers. Another question is whether the efforts are strengthening and instilling the sense of entitlement whereby young Emiratis expect to reach senior positions sooner or later. Policy practitioner 1 highlighted the UAE’s efforts for youth when they stated the following:

I’ll start from the beginning of why the UAE believes that every young person should have the opportunity to go to their fullest potential partner in a 21st-Century world. And we believe it’s the government’s duty to provide the optimal conditions for youth to grow, learn and thrive. We, as a ministry, our mission is to connect youth to every policymaker and decision-maker that shapes their future every day. We work hard to make that mission a reality so that the voice of youth shapes every sector of policy and society. And central, honestly, to achieving this mission is the philosophy or the consistent daily practice of directly engaging youth.

The examples outlined above paint a picture of the interplay of different interests in policy choices. It is clear from the conversations with the policymakers and policy practitioners that the national interest (i.e., government interests) is critical and comes first. Within that, there is nevertheless a role given to youth-related policies and programmes, allowing the government to be pre-emptive in dealing with current and future aspirations or even grievances.

6.4 Conclusion

The differences in the experiences of policymakers and policy practitioners were apparent in the way they answered my interviews' questions. To summarise, policymakers were more visionary and had a long-term perspective on the end goals of the policies and programmes while policy practitioners were more focused on the current issues and details of the policies and programmes. Policy practitioners spoke more about the challenges faced when introducing and implementing new policies and programmes. Including the different experiences in my interviews resulted in a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of policy design from the government's lens. There were slight differences between sectors depending on their experiences, their specific priorities and goals (i.e. education more focused on educational opportunities and challenges, NAFIS more focused on employing Emiratis in the private sector, etc.). However, in general, they were all aligned towards the overall vision of the UAE government for youth.

Through the use of Hall's (1997) 3I framework, I conclude there is substantial overlap between the three lenses. The key informant interview data revealed similarities and consistency in institutionalising different policies and programmes, which differs slightly from the findings from the document analysis. In summary, and in line with the assumptions made in this research, the themes under the ideas lens were highly visible in the interviewees' experiences in terms of guiding their choices of policies and programmes. Nonetheless, the narratives and perceptions shared during the interviews emphasised the power interests have in shaping policies and programmes. The key informant interview findings further substantiate the notion that strengthening the government-youth relationship is the most influential idea institutionalised through the policies and programmes. Furthermore, the success factors and outcomes interviewees shared did not clearly state how effectiveness is measured.

The data also revealed that the concept of youth development as articulated in the FYA policies and programmes documents might have been compromised since most of the interviewees used terms such as youth engagement and youth empowerment to answer questions related to youth policymaking processes, especially in terms of youth development. The empirical evidence primarily revealed efforts to engage youth not necessarily empower them or develop them. While youth initiatives may help develop some skills and capabilities in individuals to a certain extent, the scale of impact is low as they are not directly put towards developing a set of skills among all Emirati youth to contribute to the knowledge economy vision.

To expand on the concept of youth empowerment, Jennings et al.'s (2006) key dimensions of critical youth empowerment include: "a welcoming and safe environment, meaningful participation and engagement, equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change, and integrated individual- and community-level empowerment" (p.41). They expand their discussion on empowerment to illustrate how empowerment is a challenge and that shared power is more achievable on a small, localized scales where youth are fully engaged in the local community and risks are lower compared with well-established larger enterprises (Royce et al., 2004). Strong youth engagement is an essential step that could support in empowering youth for the knowledge economy vision and developing their skills and capabilities.

The idea of youth empowerment influenced the findings from the key informant interviews similar to that discussed in Chapter 5 regarding the document analysis. The complexity and overlap between interests and ideas is one of the important findings from the application of Hall's (1997) framework, here, government interests and monarchic stability seem to guide most of the policy choices as understood from analysing the interviews, all the while celebrating youth's potential as the most important resource for the UAE. Key informants did not share any tangible results from the policies and programmes. This specific finding aligns with my research's assumption that, although the aspirations and claims of involving youth are stated, there is an existing gap in tracking milestones and seeing outcomes from the government's emphasis on youth. The *NAFIS* programme, which was initially

introduced to create 75,000 jobs in the private sector, was found via the document analysis to be the sole exception as it sets a tangible target to measure its success.

When it comes to interests, a mutual concern was observed in relation to the policies and programmes between the national or government interests, and youth interests. This was expected since the government is the main decision-maker and organises how youth input is integrated into policymaking; policymaking is still designed in a top-down approach with selective youth engagement. Unlike in the 3I framework, in which Hall (1997) highlights the power of interest groups in influencing policy decisions, my analysis in relation to the interests' lens was adapted to the political structure of the UAE. This means that, notwithstanding the progressive steps to better include the youth in policymaking, efforts seem to focus on strengthening of citizenship initiatives whether national service or *Fakhr* or Emirates Youth Values National Programme as evidenced by the document analysis and key informant interviews.

Finally, if the government's goal is to develop youth skills and capabilities, there is more work to be done. In employing the three lenses of Hall's (1997) 3I framework, the analysis offers a helpful tool to investigate policymaking within a monarchic system, enabling my research to make a novel contribution to the wider academic literature on public policy development, whilst also generating knowledge about youth policymaking in the UAE.

The findings raise questions regarding how youth perceive the government's efforts and whether their perceptions, engagement, and reactions are aligned with the government's aims—I argue that their perceptions are critical to the success and effectiveness of those efforts. In the next chapter, I present the analysis and findings from the focus groups involving youth, a sample of young Emiratis and how they perceive government efforts and subsequent changes in the youth sector. From the analysis it is clear that the research is best positioned to evaluate if there are gaps to be addressed towards better policymaking to engage and develop Emirati youth. The findings from all methods of inquiry are discussed in Chapter 8, where they are explored in relation to the three main research questions posed.

Chapter 7: Emirati Youth Focus Group (EYFG) Findings

Young people experience many events in their lives which shape their personal decisions, their behaviours, and the actions they take. The differences and diversity in their individual experiences and their backgrounds, along with other influential factors, impact their choices of education, career, and self-development. There are also numerous limitations, constraints, and challenges which influence the pathways individuals take through their lives. These include social, cultural and institutional structures. Awareness of these, the role they play and their effect on human agency can helpfully be taken account of in the design of relevant public policies (Evans, 2007). The purpose of this chapter is not to document all possible factors, events, limitations, and challenges (among others) which can affect Emirati youth decision-making; rather, the aim is to enable the voices and perceptions of a sample of young people to be presented, with my analysis generating insights about the commonality and salience of particular influences on their choices.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the key informant interviews revealed that policymakers and policy practitioners believe that they are designing and enacting policies which empower and develop Emirati youth. I summarised this as a mostly top-down approach to policymaking, with selective engagement with youth. Conducting Emirati Youth Focus Groups (EYFG) enabled me to explore if and how young people feel that policies and programmes in the UAE are empowering and developing them.

Data from nine focus groups (54 participants in total) were collected. The EYFGs were structured in relation to students' academic backgrounds to ensure homogeneity within each group. To illustrate this, the EYFGs involved the following:

- Emirati students in their third and fourth years of university for those studying in the UAE, both in private and public universities.
- Male youth aged between 19 and 21 years who experienced the mandatory National Service.
- Third-year university or above for Emirati students abroad.

This research utilised Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensional framework to better understand the choices made by Emirati youth in the context of claims

by policymakers and policy practitioners (see Chapter 6). Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework was used for three main reasons. First, although social cognitive career theories—which the framework falls under—have been criticised as Western-focused, this chapter concludes otherwise. In fact, Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework offers flexibility in looking at what influences young people's choices and can be tailored to fit varying contexts regardless of its original focus. Second, the sample size, being both narrow and qualitative in design, requires a framework which is not longitudinal or exhaustive as it focuses on a specific transitional phase. Third, the framework offers a methodological contribution by applying it to the UAE, which has a different context than western countries (similar to Gulf states).

Following this Introduction (section 7.1), the chapter is organised into seven sections using the EYFG and proforma data. Section 7.2 begins with an analysis of young people's perceptions of the factors which influence their education and career choices. Section 7.3 focuses on interpersonal dimensions to identify which factors are more dominant than others in influencing the choices of Emirati youth. Section 7.4 shows the journeys that Emirati youth experience and how this relates to their choices. Section 7.5 discusses the choices participants have made to study in public universities, private universities, universities abroad, or to complete the National Service. This section examines the narratives which emerged. Findings on young people's awareness of the Youth Minister and FYA policies and programmes, highlighting *NAFIS* and the National Service, are also discussed in section 7.5 of this chapter. This is followed by concluding remarks and some important takeaways (section 7.6).

7.1 Education and Employment opportunities, and young Emiratis perception of choices

With a presentation of the findings, this section is organised to illustrate the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors on young Emiratis' choices from the focus groups discussions and data collected from the proformas. The section starts by presenting the different educational opportunities available for Emirati youth whether in the UAE or abroad, and how they influence their choices. Then, it moves to discuss the job opportunities within the country, and how young people perceive their employment decisions. In these discussions, the thesis illustrates on the findings from the focus groups and how different factors influence young people's individual choices.

Educational opportunities

When it comes to educational options, those who were influenced by intrinsic factors explained that a personal interest, stemming from internal curiosity to study a particular major or work in a specific field, influenced their choices. This was significantly more visible with Emirati youth studying abroad as their intrinsic motivations necessitated some of them to go through specific challenges to achieve their goals. For instance, a male participant explained that his choice to study abroad came from his desire to develop his own skills and capabilities: “the experience for me, to live on my own, study on my own, be independent and responsible. Fix my time, my food, my sleep, and everything else.” (M, Students Abroad)

Another participant explained how her curiosity and research interests drove her to attain her goals, whether by studying in a private university, in a different Emirate, or to complete her post-graduate degree abroad. As she stated:

Ever since I was in school, I was driven by research interests. You will see me seeking such research opportunities. So, I was like this is what I want, and I will go. I finished my four years, and I was like, I want to study in uni. And then suddenly, it was like I said something forbidden and wrong. It turned into something as if I said something really wrong. I come from a Bedouin background. They are very traditional and conservative. In my family, women don't even work. (F, Students Abroad)

Those intrinsic factors could encourage many young Emiratis to break away from familial expectations and constraints when needed to pursue their personal choices around self-development, education, and career. This example indicates that personal motivations and individual goals can highly influence a young Emirati's determination to work hard, overcome different challenges, and meet their aspirations. The individual's personal interests brought her into tension with her traditional, socially conservative background. This raises a question regarding how many young girls may be personally interested to pursue a certain degree or career but are not willing to go into conflict with their families or societies and choose to conform to the collectivistic and cultural values. However, when the intrinsic factors are insufficiently strong, extrinsic and interpersonal dimensions could arguably be the guiding

factors. Thus, choices, in reality, are not independent and are even more subjective than initially assumed.

One student at a public university in Dubai explained how her choice of studying engineering was seen as unusual. She explained that public universities are gender-segregated except when it comes to engineering majors. Women who study engineering are expected to attend mixed classes and girls around her often did not understand her decision. As she explained:

For example, I am doing mechanical engineering which you rarely see girls in. Mostly, boys go for it. So, when I ask girls why you are studying this major, they tell me it is to brag in front of the family and make my parents proud. But for me, I went for it because I am interested in the major itself. (F, Public University).

In this research, intrinsic motivations are notably weaker among female participants who study in public universities in the UAE. Those female participants chose their majors and schools because of interpersonal factors (e.g., familial and cultural constraints as discussed in section 7.2). Meanwhile, most males who study in public universities rationalised their academic choices via extrinsic factors. These findings were clear in six of the EYFGs. For example, as two participants shared:

My family encouraged me to continue my studies. If I stay at home, what am I going to do?
(F, Public university)

The place you work, it may force you to continue your study. You have to take a certain major and continue your study because, without the degree, you will not be able to get anywhere. So, I worked and then continued my study. (M, Suburban Area)

External challenges and access to opportunities are included as part of the extrinsic factors which influence many young Emiratis' choices. The availability of opportunities, or their lack, materially affects the range of choices open to young Emiratis. Geographic location plays a vital role in determining the educational options for many of those young Emiratis just because they live far from urban Centers.

One example here is that of males and females studying at public universities in suburban areas. The reason they often spoke about their continued study post-high school is that “they did not have a choice”, with most of them indicating that they would have studied other majors if those were available to them in suburban areas. Such external factors could either enable or disable, such as in this specific case—young Emiratis’ choices and, thus, their careers. Ruwais (see Figure 4⁶⁶), where one of the focus groups was conducted for young male and female Emiratis from Ruwais and neighbouring, suburban areas, have only one public university: the Higher Technology College (HCT). Not only that, but the college only offers two majors for females, Accounting and Quality Management in Business, with Engineering an additional option for males.

Figure 4: Map of the UAE showing the Ruwais area



Added to this layer of complexity is familial constraints which emerged strongly in the EYFG. For instance, it is not socially acceptable for young female Emiratis to live in university dormitories if they want to study a different major located elsewhere in the UAE (i.e., beyond the suburban areas in which they live). As one participant pointed out, “it’s not an option to study in another city. Our families wouldn’t allow us” (F, Suburban Area). Likewise, young Emirati males are mostly working students,

⁶⁶ Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oworld/map/united_arab_emirates_map.htm.

expected to live in their suburban hometowns to take care of their families. The response below illustrates this point:

You must take a certain major and continue your study because, without the degree, you will not be able to get anywhere. So, I worked and then continued my study. This is for the one who works already and must study a certain major. But if I put myself in the student's shoes, the one who isn't obliged by his workplace or something, I'd study the major I am passionate about, whether its math, I will do engineering, or aerospace. It depends about the person himself and the environment he lives in. (M, Suburban Area)

The abovementioned personal experiences demonstrate the challenges and restrictions the youth in suburban areas face when choosing what to study, a decision which could potentially impact them across their lifetime. Additionally, and when asked about study beyond high school, several female participants explained that "they had nothing else to do". This research interprets from the findings that the passion, motivation, and personal drive to pursue one's own self-development are basically missing. The following two answers are from Emirati female youth living in suburban areas:

I study because I must. So, what am I doing with my time? God will ask us. (F, Suburban Area)

I study because I have nothing else to do at home. I use my time wisely so at least I benefit from my time. A lot of girls are not able to study because EMSAT⁶⁷ stood in their way. These girls are at home not able to continue their study. (F, Suburban Area)

Choices pertaining to what to study in suburban areas are significantly constrained by availability and gendered restrictions. For example, in answering questions about reasons behind their choices of majors and if other options were considered, many have answered that "they had no choice". The reasons cited included how this was the only available option as public universities usually reserve a seat for applicants depending on availability and other criteria. Those young Emiratis face a choice dilemma, where public universities may be the only option for many of them for reasons beyond their control.

⁶⁷ EmSAT is a national system of standardised computer-based tests, based on UAE's national standards.

Thus, if the Ministry of Education decide which majors are available, this clearly constrains the scope for individual choices.

Some participants chose their majors based on the availability of jobs and labour-market demands. Others chose alternatives because they lacked the academic credential requirements needed to access their preferred choices of university and subject. Those points illustrate some of the structural constraints imposed on young nationals and how they could be disabling for many young Emiratis. While intrinsic factors guided certain choices of education for a few participants, other participants were restricted by extrinsic and interpersonal factors. In the next section, I discuss how young participants perceived their choices regarding employment and why.

Job opportunities

Some of the young people were keen on developing themselves for better career progression, social recognition, and financial incentives, which are extrinsic factors according to Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework. For example, as a male participant explained:

Among the things is the access to opportunities, whether internships, local network within the industry, recognition from government entities that are relevant to the major in one way or the other. The access to opportunities is most important to me during the time of study. (M, Students Abroad)

Notwithstanding the varied answers among the participants (see Appendix 8), the majority agreed that financial incentives, position seniority, and workload are among the most important factors young Emiratis consider when it comes to choosing what to study or where to work.

In line with the extrinsic factors which emerged from the EYFG sessions, the two most common answers in the proformas were financial incentives and career development with regard to career choices. Additionally, skills development came up in a few EYFG responses but were not the top priority for the majority of participants. Hence, my research concludes that personal growth and skills development must be important since Emirati youth are willing and are interested in utilising development opportunities, whether personally or through FYA initiatives.

Some focus group participants shared concerns around the availability of job opportunities, highlighting it as a primary challenge. Most referenced access to very limited public sector jobs as their preferred choice. As one participant noted:

I feel like there is more job security in the public sector. With the private sector, you never know what to expect. If the company decided to close down or decrease the size, you never know if you will be the one to be let out the door. (F, Abroad Students).

This could be indicating the deep entanglement young Emiratis have with government jobs, possibly also as a result of the rentier mentality. The majority did not show interest in private sector employment or consider it, rationalising it as racist and insecure: “the private sector do not really want you but they are forced to take you in. They are also racist against Emiratis but the government is forcing them to hire” (F, Suburban Area). When asked about jobs opportunities, participants explained how in the labour market the number of jobs is decreasing. However, their reference to limited job opportunities was related to public sector jobs, which are saturated with Emiratis. The reasons for their preference towards the public sector, provided in the proformas and in the focus groups discussions themselves, were around job security, higher pay, better working hours, comfortable environments, and having more annual leave. As one participant stated, “the work environment, the distance from home, the salary, and the annual leave” (M, Suburban Area). These findings relate to the social contract concept (see Chapter 2). While the government is trying to slowly shift the mindset of youth by guiding them towards the private sector or entrepreneurship, it was found that most participants still prefer the favourable conditions of the public sector.

Similarly, other participants expressed concerns about the treatment in the private sector, where they perceived that nationals need to be respected and appreciated more. This perception seemed culturally instilled in the majority of the participants, even those who had no experience in the private sector. In rentier states, citizens expect the government to provide education and job opportunities that match the individual expectations (Hertog, 2020). However, other participants who were working in the private sector while also studying disagreed with the concerns shared by non-working students. As one participant stated:

I am currently a working student and working in the private sector and I am so happy with my job. Before working in private, I thought it's bad, but I joined before *NAFIS*—the perks were good and they used to give us a lot. Before joining, I had a very bad idea about it, but after joining, I realised that private is really good. I wanted the private to try it. I like trying things. I would move long-term to public because I already worked in private, but I haven't experienced public. I want to do both to see what is different between them. Then, I will settle in what I like more. (F, Public University)

These are some examples illustrating the perceptions young nationals hold about the private sector. Most of these were negative, while others were positive and held encouragement towards trying the private sector. Overall, the general perception of “no jobs” was limited to public sector employment. This indicates a clear gap between the findings from the key informant interviews and the youth. The key informants highlighted the effectiveness and success of Emiratisation efforts, including *NAFIS*, while participants did not seem enticed (see Chapter 6). Nonetheless, findings from the EYFG revealed that the majority of youth would still rather hold on to public sector employment. In fact, few participants were willing to remain unemployed rather than consider employment in the private sector.

This view could be tied to participants' personal fear about stepping out of their comfort zone as the private sector offers no special treatment for Emiratis. There was a sense of entitlement stemming from the rentier mentality that was felt in some answers and a persistent bias towards public sector employment. As one participant stated:

Those around me say that the private is too exhausting but the public is more comfortable. They say private, you have to work hard, but public, at the end of the day, it is your country, so it is okay whatever you give. (F, Private University)

Perceptions around the private sector were found to be mainly negative, except for a few participants who saw potential in the private sector. A few participants welcomed the idea of the private sector with certain conditions in place, such as “if they fix the environment” and “become better”. Also,

those coming from practical majors, such as engineering, were more likely to join the private sector for experience and then move to the public sector. The public sector still seemed to be the long-term plan.

The diversity in responses shows how young people envision the responsibility and role of government in providing job opportunities and how social perceptions influence and guide their career aspirations which comes from the rentier mentality (see chapter 3). Lastly, entrepreneurship was almost always seen as an option alongside a stable public sector job—85 per cent of total responses on the proformas and in the focus groups confirmed this perception, and less than 15 per cent of the participants saw entrepreneurship as a full-time job⁶⁸.

In summary, this section presented the qualitative findings from the EYFGs and reflected on them through exploring the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions which influence young Emiratis' choices regarding education and career. The extrinsic factors discussed appear to be both enabling and disabling to many, especially those coming from suburban areas and conservative environments. It was found that not all young people are able to make their own choices or are motivated by their intrinsic factors. Many of them would rather conform and follow the rules within the gendered restrictions, geographic constraints, and collectivistic cultural values. The intrinsic factors were weaker in most responses except in terms of those who chose to study abroad and had to persevere. Studying abroad is not the norm, however. There were also a few participants who were able to pursue their degrees abroad because of the interpersonal factors and their influence on young people's choices, which are discussed in the following section.

7.2 Family, society, and social networks

This section explores changes in how young males and females think about their societal roles, which reflects the interpersonal factors influencing youth choices. Specifically, interpersonal factors include those related to the influence of family, friends, peers, teachers, social responsibilities. The section also discusses the findings on the influence is social capital particularly in the form of the *Wasta* factor, which determine youth access to opportunities. During one of the focus group sessions, a female

⁶⁸ Entrepreneurship is defined as self-employment where individuals manage their own businesses.

participant raised that fortunately, she had received three scholarship opportunities as a result of her social network, rather than merit. She further explained how unfair this is to many students who do not get the same access to opportunities:

The person applying has the requirements, fits the criteria, applies to those scholarships, but then *Wasta* plays into it. So, when this happens, not everyone gets an equal opportunity [...] I feel the whole aspect of it there isn't an equal opportunity for everyone as much as they say there is so much support from the government—there is a big gap in reaching the right people. You are reaching the privileged ones and missing other segments. (F, Abroad Students)

In another focus group with males in public universities, a participant mentioned how *Wasta* plays a role in the job opportunities young people get. He drew on his own experience of wanting to study abroad but was unable to because he was missing the *Wasta* factor. As he stated:

My high school grade was okay, and I could've gotten an opportunity if I had a *Wasta*. *Wasta* was the biggest thing. It's the biggest challenge. I passed everything until the final interview—the *Wasta* was my challenge. Even the interviewer himself told me get a *Wasta*. I have the signature, but I cannot do anything if you don't get me a *Wasta* from the top level. (M, Suburban Area)

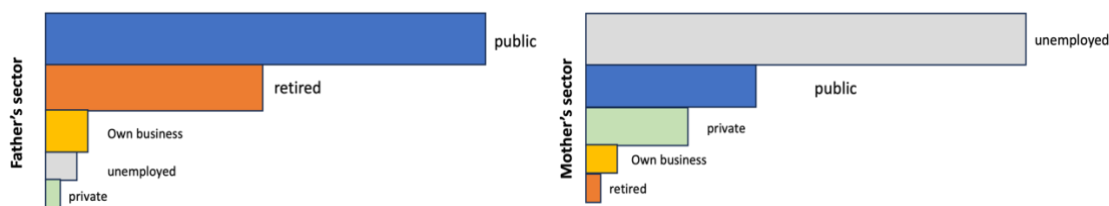
A certain level of frustration was evident in the discussions as participants expressed their own challenges when it comes to unfair access to opportunities—it was found that some are more privileged than others due to stronger social capital.

Another interesting finding was males' and females' views on the role of women in the labour market. Both genders appeared encouraging of the idea of females working and this was observed in the majority of the EYFGs, with the exception only of a few negative perceptions around females working in some sectors. Specifically, there was shared agreement around jobs which are “unacceptable for women” from societal and cultural lenses. For example, becoming a nurse or social media influencer, engaging in manual labour, and/or becoming traditional media presenters and anchors were considered highly unacceptable. This may be related to the nightshift feature of some of kinds of work,

which would be socially unacceptable for women. However, I followed up on the reasons given for these perceptions by asking the following: “What if she is a doctor?” And the answers changed. This indicates that the prestige of the job and its priority play an important role in whether it is perceived as suitable for females.

The job of a doctor is viewed as one of the most respected jobs in the UAE and families traditionally encourage their children to pursue it as a career. Nevertheless, nurses are not seen at the same level of importance and prestige. Also, media-related jobs are viewed negatively due to cultural norms and religious reasons. A male participant further elaborated on why he is against media sector jobs for women by saying: “The only condition is that she is not the product or the service. She is not the reason for the revenue through the business model of the company” (M, Abroad Students). When it comes to labour-intensive jobs, such as construction, those are seen as highly dominated by blue-collar foreign labour and as socially unacceptable for both genders. There was general acceptance towards women working in a mixed environment, which is progressive when compared to previous generations where females were mostly teachers (gender-segregated jobs) or unemployed. This was further illustrated in the answers on the proformas. The top answer for a mother’s occupation was unemployed (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Demographics of the EYFG participants’ parents’ occupations



Furthermore, and when analysing the proformas, there were two main findings related to young people’s choices of role models and career paths which are that 1) family, rulers, and the prophet were the most cited role models, and 2) some parents’ backgrounds seem to influence youth people’s career choices. It was interesting to see that the majority of students who answered the proforma with a preference towards public sector employment shared similar attributes where the father was employed in the public sector, the mother was unemployed, and their secondary education was undertaken in a

public school. The limited exposure to different cultures and nationalities could be further shaping young people's perceptions of the right career choices. These are job options they believe are safe and possible.

Table 13: Section 2 Proforma

<p><u>Section 2</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please indicate your choice of major and university. 2. Please give brief reasons for why you have chosen this major and university. 3. Would you have considered or would want to consider a different major? Please circle Yes or No 4. If 'yes', can you briefly outline why? 5. What are your career aspirations? 6. What is your top priority when choosing a job? 7. Do you prefer public sector, private sector, or starting your own business? Can you give a brief reason for your answer? 8. On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your choices so far? Elaborate please. 9. Who is your role model? Can you give a brief reason for your answer? 10. Take a minute to reflect. Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? 11. If you have completed your university requirement of an internship, can you tell me about your experience and how did you choose the place you went to? If you have not yet completed it but are planning to, where are you considering and why are they your preferred options?

Ninety-five per cent of participant responses mentioned either family, UAE rulers, or the Muslims' Prophet Mohammed as their role models, all of which fall under the interpersonal factors which could influence young people's choices. In explaining their answers, participants highlighted how their families inspire them to pursue specific career paths and excel in them just the way their parents did. Further, they rationalised their answers on choosing the founding father or the current UAE rulers as being inspired to accomplish and follow the vision of the leaders. Lastly, the Prophet inspired many of the young participants in resembling the highest level of manners and being celebrated as the most respected person in the Islamic religion.

The abovementioned answers could also relate to the ideals and values young Emiratis hold (i.e., in their collectivistic culture), which influence and shape young people's mindsets and guide their thinking and decisions in different ways. Young Emiratis value those figures and hold them at the highest level because, both socially and religiously, they are perceived to be highly influential. This further raises questions around how much of young people's choices should be considered intrinsic versus extrinsic and interpersonal? Not only that, but how do culture, society, upbringing, experiences, and institutional structures influence personal choice? Upbringing and familial influence were found to be highly visible and strong within the Emirati youth sampled, and these factors have the potential to socially engineer young people choices—their perceptions of policies could incorporate those important factors to maximise impact and effectiveness while aligning with youths' interests and ideals.

Another interesting finding from the proformas can be seen in responses regarding a mother's or father's occupation and how they relate to young participants' choices around education and employment (see Figure 5). The answers were diverse in this aspect with a few main commonalities. In many cases, if one or both parents worked in the public sector, or the mother was unemployed or retired, there seemed to be more likeliness that the young participant preferred the public sector, as mentioned earlier. This does not necessarily mean causation. Correlation, meanwhile, definitely stands out. This perception may have been influenced by their backgrounds and what they have experienced in their own homes, making the public sector seem like the right choice. Notably, even as the majority of participants in the EYFG stated public or private sector, with entrepreneurship on the side, as their preference, some participants stated in the proformas that their aspiration is to have their own business as a full-time job and to succeed in it. This finding contradicts the answers shared in the EYFGs and could be further investigated. My assumption here is that since the proformas were filled out individually, participants were given more leeway to share their views without having to conform to those of others. Others have also re-confirmed their thoughts into choosing entrepreneurship in addition to a stable public sector job.

Interestingly, answers related to what jobs are socially unacceptable for males were that all jobs are acceptable, except for becoming a social media influencer, labourers, or chef. The negative association with these jobs could be related to the jobs being seen as lower-class, lower skilled jobs,

unstable, and culturally unacceptable: “Anything that requires higher education, I think is okay” (M, Abroad Students). As another participant explained, “Social expectations are holding us back from so many jobs” (M, National Service). And, finally, yet another participant stated that, “If he has his business only, it is not acceptable” (F, Public University) which implies that entrepreneurship is not seen as stable and, consequently, is only perceived to be socially acceptable as a part-time way for men to generate additional income.

As to females working, a few male participants still held the view that the role of women is primarily as housewives and that they would prefer having a stay-at-home wife. Those participants came mainly from the suburban focus group, the area of which is arguably more conservative than other areas in the UAE. In contrast, women from the same suburban area were keen on working and being financially independent: “I think one of the reasons that when we work after graduating, five years down the line, where are we going to work, what is our salary going to be, the future—these are the most important points we consider” (F, Suburban Area).

To summarise, the intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions were found to be diverse and different between young people based on their backgrounds, life experiences, and current circumstances, all of which could have shaped their perceptions regarding decisions around the right major, university, and future job. This section highlighted familial and social factors as some of the main interpersonal factors influencing young Emiratis’ choices of education and employment. The next section presents the different narratives of young Emiratis’ journeys and how they affect their individual choices.

7.3 Different youth journeys

My sampling strategy allowed me to collect diverse stories of youth going through a critical transition phase in their lives as they consider their labour market options. The initial plan was to keep the same criterion for Emirati students abroad too. However, it seemed more appropriate for my research to widen the selection criteria since those studying abroad made a personal choice to stay in academia, be it post-graduate or doctoral studies, rather than joining the labour market upon graduation.

Here, I will be reporting and reflecting on the findings from the different kinds of focus groups, how participants' responses varied and the factors they are subject to. Starting with the National Service recruits (eight participants in total), most of them were keen to continue their studies because of the National Service. Meanwhile, after the Service, three of them chose to work instead. They justified their decisions by suggesting that participating in the Service made them lose their previously held motivation to study. Nonetheless, there was a shared struggle expressed by the distress and negative effect the Service has on young males' development opportunities, especially financially and when getting married. They all agreed that the Service built youth nationalistic values and strengthened their loyalty to serve the UAE. Nevertheless, they agreed that it also takes from their opportunities and compromises what young males can achieve as they start their academic journeys and careers later than women.

When asked whether there is delay in the average marriage age because of the Service, some explained that women working had an impact in delaying the average marriage age. This was also highlighted in some of the other EYFGs. Some males were also against marrying a working woman. For instance, as a male participant stated, "I see that when women worked it really affected the marriage age. Also, the job opportunities are less for us so you cannot get a job, while the girl is working, how embarrassing it would be to propose to a girl?" (M, National Service). Another male participant was more forthcoming about the effect of the Service:

Maybe the girl is working so her family wouldn't accept you if she makes more than what you make. The girl expects a lot from you financially, so that has a lot of negative effects. The guy works and saves and a lot of things. (M, National Service)

There was a common perception among most male participants that women are presented with more opportunities today that make them financially independent and less keen on the idea of marriage. However, most female participants, including those studying abroad, welcomed the idea of getting married and starting families upon completion of their degrees. This suggests that males' perceptions

may be coming from a place of insecurity as, because of the Service requirement, they have to start their education and career journeys slightly later than females⁶⁹.

The second set of EYFGs included mixed genders of Emirati students in private universities. The majority of participants were more open towards exploring career paths in the private or public sector, as well as in becoming entrepreneurs compared with participants in other EYFGs. Another interesting insight was how some of them had to study at a private university because *they had no choice*. Public universities have specific requirements that some students view as difficult (e.g., EmSAT)⁷⁰. In contrast, some private universities are more flexible in their requirements, especially for those who choose to work and study.

The third set of EYFGs was conducted with study-abroad students who were in the UAE at the time of the fieldwork for their winter break. Those EYFGs revealed mainly how personal aspirations and intrinsic factors are the main drivers behind their choices of study. Another factor which motivated some participants in those EYFGs were interpersonal, where family support played a key role in them studying abroad. This was a shared experience between both genders. Participants also explained how studying abroad could offer them better opportunities for recognition and employment in the public sector (extrinsic factors).

The fourth set of EYFGs included Emirati students in public universities in an urban city. The students expressed their frustration within their academic institutions because of the requirements and how often they change. With regard to career choices, most female students emphasised that the public sector is their preferred choice. Male students who were enrolled in engineering majors leaned towards the private sector for better on-the-job experience, after which they would move to the public sector.

The last set of EYFGs was completed with Emirati students in a public university in a suburban area. The most outstanding insight here was how limited their options are. Instead of choice, it was more about restricted academic options and familial limitations which determined their choices of study.

⁶⁹ The length of the National Service is nine months for males now. Some get an exemption after three months if they meet the required criteria and pass the relevant test/s.

⁷⁰ EmSAT is the Emirates Standardized Test which is computer-based assessment on the UAE's national academic standards

The common lack of awareness of FYA policies and programmes, as well as of the Youth Minister, was consistent throughout almost all EYFGs.

In a nutshell, the nine EYFGs had their own similarities and differences. The similarities within each focus group helped to steer the conversation and encouraged participants to share their views. The differences, although limited, were helpful when participants wanted to support their views with evidence and stories to support their points. Clearly though, socioeconomic, cultural and familial factors were found to highly influence how young individuals perceive their opportunities, all of which fall under the interpersonal dimension of Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework. Willingness from the youth to work hard, to develop themselves, and to serve the country was evident. So too were the ideals the government aims to instil in young Emiratis.

Moreover, the challenges faced by the youth play a critical role in the way they view their opportunities—these were flagged as external factors in my research. The findings suggest that intrinsic factors are key to motivating young Emiratis to develop themselves and change their mindsets and attitudes about their education and career choices. However, the EYFGs highlighted the structural institutions, both the extrinsic and interpersonal, as more dominant in guiding young Emiratis' choices. The next section discusses the main findings around young people's knowledge about the Youth Minister and the policies and programmes for youth, all of which fall under extrinsic factors influencing young Emiratis.

7.4 Government efforts and youth perceptions

The EYFGs included questions about participants' knowledge of the Minister of State for Youth, Shamma Almazrui, and how this had had a direct impact on them. The goal was to understand whether government efforts dedicated to youth have had any influence on the way young Emiratis' think and may have motivated their aspirations or influenced their personal choices around education and employment. The surprising and most outstanding insight was that the majority of participants had minimal knowledge about the Youth Minister, a finding consistent throughout eight out of the nine EYFGs, "I know her name, but I have not heard about any impactful things she has done" (F, Abroad Students). Prior to the fieldwork, my assumption was that young Emiratis would have known about

Minister Almazrui as she represents them and their voice to policymakers. This assumption proved flawed, however. Young people's perceptions of the youth minister and youth-related initiatives could be an influential factor on their decisions to contribute to the labour market, and the extent to which they might benefit from the policies and programmes designed for them. Those factors while extrinsic are still critical.

Those who knew of the Youth Minister were positively motivated. They felt that she could play an inspirational role for young Emiratis to pursue their choices and develop themselves to attain senior positions at an early age. Below are answers to the question asking about the impact of having a youth minister:

Motivation honestly. I felt that youth like me can reach this level and position at a younger age. It's encouraging. (F, Abroad Students).

Positive impact. In terms of the major, which is social science because she studied BA in economics. the other point was that she went to a local university but at the same time an international school, so you don't compromise on your opportunities since we have the top schools locally. There are so many things. Her age. It is like hitting multiple birds at once. (M, Abroad Students)

These findings raise questions around young Emiratis' willingness to join the private sector if they are inspired to follow the Youth Minister as their role model. Granted, the Youth Minister was appointed at the age of 22, her entire career is limited to the public sector. Therefore, if the government's aim is to actually move Emiratis to the private sector and change their mindsets about their employment choices, it is important to understand how the Youth Minister's career resonates with Emirati youth, "Here in Alruwais, the options we have are very limited in the private sector. You are a cashier in a supermarket with a salary less than 8,000 AED. Also, your family will not accept it. Honestly, it is not nice to see an Emirati in such a position instead of an Emirati holding a high position" (F, Suburban Area).

One interesting story came from a female participant, who used Almazrui to influence her parents to pursue her academic aspirations. As she explained:

I used the fact that Shamma was appointed to convince my parents to go to NYU AD⁷¹. I told them that she graduated from the same university that accepted me. I showed it to my dad, and I was like, “Look how successful she is”. As a parent, you hear the success stories, and you imagine your own child having that success story. With my dad, you know how successful she is, and this just helped in him wanting to support me more. And whenever someone would mention to my dad that, “Oh, your daughter is studying in AD”, my dad would just point out to the minister as a reference. (F, Abroad Students)

The female participant’s experience was insightful and unique. The existence of a Youth Minister made influencing change in a Bedouin family possible. This is even more telling and inspiring when considering that Bedouin families are known to be stricter and more conservative than other families in the UAE. The female’s passion came intrinsically, with familial support playing an important role in her education choices, whether by studying in a private university outside her area of residence, or even by doing her post-graduate degree abroad. Yet, and given her background, seeing how a story of a successful young woman minister was able to convince her father to support her choice demonstrates positive impact.

Aside from the female’s success story, there were also some negative insights gathered around the appointment of the Youth Minister. There was a clear lack of awareness by the majority of participants. This could indicate a gap in awareness, communication, and outreach to the mass youth segment. Also, the positive motivational impact is an advantage for the government that could be used to inspire other young nationals using the minister as hero story. However, if the minister was appointed at 22, with minimal experience that does not include private sector, how motivational is the example? How does it feed into the government’s vision? How could it change the mindset to view the private sector as the future, to invest in one’s skills and capabilities development, and explore options beyond public sector employment? Here, there is an opportunity to strengthen the engagement and communication with Emirati youth to maximise impact, which could subsequently be further explored and utilised for the benefit of young Emiratis and the UAE Government. The next sub-section looks

⁷¹ New York University, Abu Dhabi.

specifically at how government policies and programmes are perceived by participants and how they relate to them, if at all.

7.4.1 FYA policies and programmes and *NAFIS*

Akin to findings in the previous section, it became clear that most participants lacked awareness and knowledge about the FYA policies and programmes, despite there being a wide range of them (see Chapter 5 for details). This is a challenge many policymakers face in the UAE and elsewhere, identifying a gap in communication and outreach which policymakers could address. To exemplify, in asking participants about which, if any, do they know of the FYA policies and programmes, the majority did not know any, with the exception of only a few in one of the EYFGs. A female participant explained that there could be an issue in communicating with universities to reach out to students. As she stated, “No idea. Maybe because there is a lack of awareness from university to let us know?” (F, private university).

Another participant aware of the efforts disagreed with this point and explained that the university always communicates and advertises opportunities: “Our university always sends an email that there is this or that. So, you are aware as a student, of course, this depends on you as a person and whether you are interested to find opportunities” (F, private university).

It is unclear at this point if there is in fact a gap in communication and whether such a gap stems from the FYA, the universities, or both. This could be further investigated. One possible solution is for the FYA to institutionalise the communication approach with all entities relevant to youth in order to ensure young people know about the policies and programmes beyond advertising them on social media. As one participant pointed out:

We have seen a lot on media, but I haven’t been impacted in any way. We didn’t see any real impact. We have seen on social media that she launched this or announced that and celebrated the national day and we know that she is the minister for youth, but we haven’t seen any big changes since she was appointed. (M, Public University)

The participants knew more about the *NAFIS* initiative than they did about the FYA policies and programmes. One reason for this could be the relevancy of *NAFIS* to the challenges that Emirati youth

face when it comes to job opportunities. It could also be related to it being launched recently, in 2021, and the communication around it. A male participant highlighted that *NAFIS* could be positively impacting young people's perception about the private sector. As he recounted:

Absolutely. The perception that most people have is that the private sector doesn't have the flexibility. But in recent times, I have noticed after *NAFIS*, how a lot of Emiratis joined the private sector and are comfortable and happy with it. The only hassle I used to see as a guy is the salary aspect. This was the most important factor for many guys. After *NAFIS*, many joined the private sector. For me, personally, as an engineer, it's better to start in the private sector. From those who have had experience in private sector, you start in private sector, put your hands on as an engineer, get the right experience, and then in the long-term public sector is better for you as an Emirati. (M, Public University)

Other participants were still pessimistic about *NAFIS* and did not consider it a solution. One of the participants shared her view on *NAFIS*, pointing out that it is not effective: "The private sector is not encouraging because you rarely find Emiratis. Foreign employees are too competitive to keep their jobs and threatened by our employment. Also, my salary as a national is much higher. *NAFIS* does not deposit the money on time for a lot of people" (F, Public University).

Some of the participants showed awareness about *NAFIS* and saw it as a promising initiative, but the majority were either unaware or uninterested. There was also some pessimism shared with regard to *NAFIS*, particularly regarding how private sector employers treat Emiratis, strengthening their interest in the public sector: "*NAFIS* supports the Emiratis. One of the things we mentioned was Emirates exchange. They were putting Emiratis in service jobs intentionally, so the Emirati feels pressured and leaves the job" (M, Suburban Area). By this example, he refers to how some private sector employers would choose to place Emiratis in lower-skilled jobs to make them want to resign. This approach will not result in fining the company. However, it does not help in recruiting and retaining Emiratis in the private sector when the opportunities are not appealing or rewarding.

There were also many different experiences with the *NAFIS* initiative. This necessitates a further investigation to better understand why youth are more aware of *NAFIS* and for what reasons, more so

when compared with their knowledge of FYA policies and programmes. The current findings did not reveal whether the financial incentives which come with *NAFIS* constitute the reason for this, or something else.

The next section of this chapter looks into the mandatory National Service for young males and its impact on their perceptions and aspirations. The National Service affects all young males who fit the set criterion and it comes at a critical age for males, both of which warrant the analysis in this research (see Chapter 2).

7.4.2 The National Service

Since this research is exploratory, I wanted to include insights from different experiences and perceptions as to what influences young Emiratis' choices. Participants' experiences regarding the Service revealed the different impact it had had—this impact was expressed and felt strongly during the session. For example, the first few questions focused on the impact of the Service on young nationals, with some answers highlighting how negative the Service was and how it had impacted the personality and education choices of many young males. As one young recruit stated:

Going back to studying after completion of the Service is tough. I found myself without passion after the Service for academia. I thought that after high school, I would want to study and finish a lot of things but after a year and two months in the Service, I no longer feel the same excitement to study. I just want to get it over with. (M, National Service)

Another participant raised the issue of age grouping in military and how some males who are older in age can negatively influence the younger ones. As one participated explained:

There are lots of negative things also. Because, for example, when I entered, I was 18. The guy who entered with me was 27 years old with a criminal history. So, such a thing can negatively affect someone who is 18. Not everyone has a strong personality. The weak ones can be influenced. Who then suffers? The mother. Also, there are positive things: you meet good people. You can't decide who you meet. The selection is random in terms of who you are put with. (M, National Service)

Another factor identified as negatively associated with the Service is that it affects young males' employment choices. This was illustrated in how the military offers jobs to the recruits with good financial incentives and packages without requiring an academic degree. While the offers may seem financially appealing, the issue with this is that it puts young recruits in the position of making quite mature decisions. Additionally, because the Service recruits are not allowed to contact their families and friends outside, they are prone to rushing into decisions without proper consultation and consideration. My own reflection on this specific point is that there should be better understanding of the government's aim behind the Service and a determination of whether the goals clash. Specifically, is it to encourage young males to join the military service, which is different than academia? Or is it to develop highly talented and competitive youth to choose the private sector and help support the government's growth vision?

Another person expressed his feelings and view of the Service as an experience which includes both positives and negatives. As he explained:

There is a positive and a negative side to it. The negative side is that the student starts his life in school from Grade 1 until Grade 12. Then, all of a sudden, a stop happens. You are in the National Service for a year and two months. This is the first year and a half of my life where I am not studying. It affected my academic level, the way I think—there are things I forgot from my study. On the positive side, you become responsible, independent, patient, and many others. You appreciate time more. You become more social. (M, National Service)

There were also other responses highlighting the positive impact the Service had. For example, some participants were thinking of a military career prior to the Service. After experiencing it, however, they realised it is not the right career path for them. Additionally, others highlighted how the Service helps to instil loyalty and nationalistic values in young males, which they perceive to be a positive outcome.

The perceptions and experiences associated with the Service varied overall but its impact on males' future career and self-development was a recurring theme. Young males blamed the timing of the Service for delaying their future plans, compromising their opportunities, and making it unfair when compared with females. They also shared their frustration in how academia and the military are

different, and one could not be expected to shift mindsets between “Yes, sir” and wanting to study and think critically and intellectually. As one participant pointed out:

Military and academia are very different. You can't expect the same mindset. The military people think this system would work, but if you ask an academic is this possible, he would tell you, no. Military work is very different. I believe that after university is much better to join the service. (M, National Service)

Another participant highlighted how the Service affects males' confidence as they think about marriage and blame it for forcing many young Emiratis to lower their standards. He further explained how a girl his age would have already accomplished many things by the time he graduates from university. Participants have also highlighted the distress which comes with the Service as it offers fewer opportunities to them, especially if they are keen on getting married and starting families. When they were asked about the delay in average marriage age, many participants blamed the Service.

There is another point that I also see. Me today, as a guy 18 years old, I enter university when I am 20 or 21. By 21, the same girl as I already finished her bachelor's degree. Now, this girl gets better opportunities. They wouldn't want a guy who is 24. What happens here is a problem in families. By the end of the day, I am expected to be the provider, not the woman, but if the girl is getting more than me, she wouldn't accept it. She will see herself on me. (M, National Service)

That being said, participants did share suggestions to address the challenges associated with the Service. They mentioned that the timing of the Service could be changed and agreed that it taking place after graduation from university would be better than right after graduating high school. This, they believed, could impact their motivation to study, with pre-university commencement distracting them from pursuing academia.

The previous section shared findings from the Service EYFG to shed light on how young males feel about the impact the Service policy had on them and their peers. This is important towards understanding the mindsets, engagement, and reactions to one of the main government policies and

programmes affecting youth transitions and choices. This is important as the National Service comes at a critical age for young males and is still relatively new. From the different experiences participants shared, it is clear that the Service has an influence in shaping their choices of education and employment. Also, by showcasing the perceptions young Emiratis have about the youth minister and the FYA's policies and programmes, the evidence points to there being room for improvement, especially when it comes to engaging with and communicating the efforts to the wider youth population, and aligning the initiatives, approach and design with the government's vision for young people. The next section further discusses the findings from the focus groups.

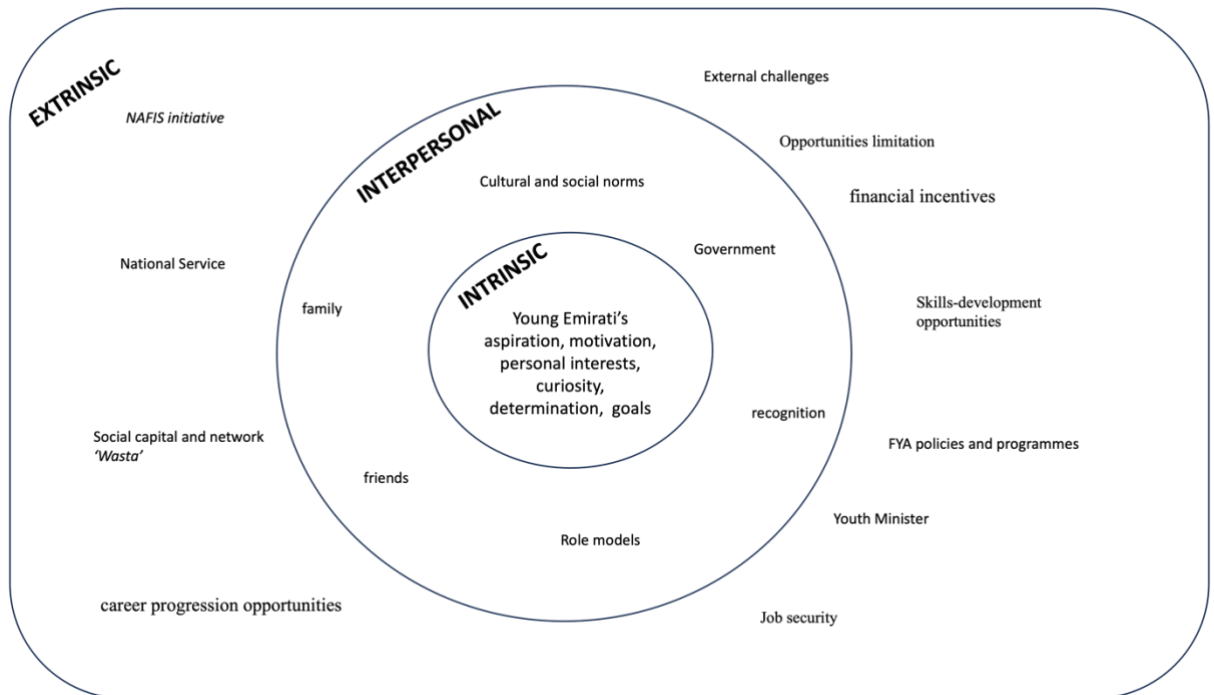
7.5 Discussion on the EYFG findings

My literature review (Chapter 3) highlighted that choices are dependent and subjective in nature. With the UAE's highly collectivistic culture (see chapters 2 and 3), society and culture crucially influential to the choices youth make. To illustrate this, when policies take a top-down approach and are assumed effective by design, they do not account for the structural constraints which could impact young people's choices. According to policymakers and policy practitioners, all youth-related policies are designed to empower and develop youth. However, the approach is still highly top-down which consults only a very selective sample of youth (see Chapter 6).

My question here is whether this mostly top-down approach approach to policy formation does accommodate young people's aspirations and truly empowers and develops them to achieve them. In other words, there is need to understand from Emirati youth whether they feel engaged and included in policy design, and to what extent. By conducting the EYFG, this research did not expand the pool of the sample in terms of the top-down approach by size but by geographic coverage, attributes, demographics, and social factors to remote areas in the UAE, such as Ruwais (see Figure 4). This was done in an effort to engage a more diverse sample of youth and for them to directly voice their aspirations and challenges. Expanding the sample has offered invaluable insights as to whether a more representative cross-section of youth do in fact feel empowered and are undergoing development, as policymakers and policy practitioners claim.

Through a comprehensive analysis addressing the second main research question and identifying the gaps between policymakers, policy practitioners and Emirati youth, this research aimed to provide recommendations which would better inform FYA policies and programmes. The data supported notions that the UAE remains a strongly collectivistic culture and institution, and that government policies and programmes have been successful in instilling certain ideals and values among Emirati youth, strengthening both familial and social identity. Additionally, there are government, society, and family expectations from Emirati youth which could be seen as either restrictive or enabling depending on context. Figure 6 summarises the findings using the three intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions and their influence (Carpenter & Foster, 1977).

Figure 6: Summary of the findings using Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework



Throughout the EYFG, Emirati youth shared their own personal stories and experiences, which guided their decisions around education and employment. Mapping the evidence in Figure 3 enables a deeper understanding of how personal motivation incentivises a handful of choices, influenced by extrinsic and interpersonal factors. This also allows a more comprehensive understanding of the decision-making process that Emirati youth undertake. Interestingly, the data revealed a certain level of ignorance among Emirati youth when they were asked about the Youth Minister and FYA policies and programmes. This is a critical finding, demonstrating an even wider gap between what policymakers

and policy practitioners claim and what Emirati youth perceive and experience. Specifically, how can youth be truly empowered and developed if they are ignorant or unaware of who the Youth Minister is and what the FYA policies and programmes are? There could also be other possible routes to empowerment and development (e.g., expertise-specific capabilities-building programmes, wider inclusion of young people's opinions in policymaking), but this is not seen in the options chosen by the government so far.

Furthermore, EYFG participants shared their experiences about the effect of *Wasta* (i.e., social capital which individuals possess, and which can directly impact the number and quality of opportunities presented to, or withheld from, them).

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on presenting the main findings from the proformas and EYFGs to illustrate how youth perceive and react to the UAE Government's policies and programmes. Data from the EYFGs first revealed how youth view their progression in life based on what is important to them and how that influences their thinking about their academic qualifications and career choices (intrinsic factors). While personal motivation is important to drive self-development, it became evident from the nine EYFGs that extrinsic and interpersonal factors were highly influential in terms of the choices young Emiratis make. Despite their different backgrounds and experiences, the influence that family, society, recognition, and financial incentives have had on Emirati youth choices was agreed upon by most participants. In other words, social and cultural aspects play an essential role in guiding Emirati youth choices, their perception of career success, and what is (un)acceptable. The importance of skills development arose in several of the responses and proformas with, financial incentives additionally highlighted. Among the challenges youth encounter when making their choices, participants predominantly highlighted the influence of social capital as an issue which determines their access to opportunities and the impact of geographic location.

The chapter then discussed the findings regarding young people's awareness of the Youth Minister and FYA policies and programmes. These are key to answering the third main research question and to exploring how Emirati youth perceive and engage with the government's efforts. Most

participants lacked awareness of both or exhibited minimal knowledge and engagement. Those efforts fall under the extrinsic factors which could impact the choices Emirati youth make. The chapter concluded by presenting findings from the mandatory National Service and how it impacts males' choices and journeys. There was diversity in their experiences, with some sharing positive experiences and others negative. However, the participants agreed on points whereby the Service could be seen as a significant factor affecting their life plans, their self-confidence, and limiting their opportunities.

The various types of focus groups generated different and similar results. Specifically, participants coming from suburban areas faced similar challenges in terms of limited choices around study and their familial constraints. Some of those studying abroad faced comparable challenges in pursuing their education, securing scholarships, and convincing their families of their choices. In addition, those who went in to National Service had very similar experiences in the way the Service had impacted their opportunities and choices. Those who studied in private universities and public universities in urban areas exhibited differences depending on their motivations to study and their current majors of study. Overall, the majority of participants lacked awareness and knowledge about the Youth Minister and FYA initiatives, were influenced by interpersonal factors, and held strong nationalistic values. In light of the evidence from the EYFGs, the approach to policymaking for youth appears to be perceived and experienced as top-down. Therefore, there is likely substantial benefit in widening the involvement and diversity of youth, especially in terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds, geographical locations, challenges, perceptions of opportunities, and engagement with the policies and programmes.

In the next chapter, the findings from the document analysis, key informant interviews and the EYFGs are discussed all together in terms of how they relate to the three main research questions, the conceptual frameworks, and theorisations drawn on. The gaps and themes which emerged through the analyses are reiterated, before several recommendations are given.

Chapter 8: Discussion: Steps toward Emirati Youth Development

This research developed the hypothesis that various social, cultural, and institutional factors are key to determining young Emiratis' choices around education and employment and to guiding policymakers' decisions in the UAE's youth sector. The aim of the research was to understand what influences the development of youth policies in the UAE, what influences young Emiratis' choices around education and employment, and how and in what ways do young people perceive and engage with the government's efforts? These questions were investigated in this research using a mixed-methods qualitative approach.

When it comes to young Emiratis, the empirical data illustrated that each person's horizons differ significantly, painting a picture of what seems like each having a personal choice. However, the evidence has indicated that in practice youth choices are limited by familial and wider social factors, and a sense of entitlement linked to the UAE's historical and structural positioning as a rentier state. Those who study abroad are the exception and highlight where there is stronger independence in choice and focus on development, but no clarity on whether this translates to empowerment.

The UAE Government, as information gathered from the key informant interviews showed, has dedicated extensive efforts to create policies and programmes to support young Emiratis' self-development and their ability to contribute to the economic goals of the country. However, even with the appointment of the Youth Minister and the establishment of the FYA, the findings reveal that there is a gap between policymaking and engagement from Emirati youth, specifically with regard to their perceptions and behaviours.

In this chapter, the main findings relevant to the three main research questions are presented. Using Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework which looks at the different factors influencing young people's career choices of intrinsic (i.e., stimulated by personal interest, curiosity to learn, enjoyment), extrinsic (i.e., mainly social recognition, financial security, career progression) and interpersonal factors (i.e., person's relationship with family, friends, others influencing their choice) influencing career choices, the evidence gathered in this research substantiates the notion that the rentier mentality exists among young Emiratis with respect to how they make their choices around education and employment.

The sense of entitlement, still alive and well, is not easy to change. The impact of acquiring wealth through oil and natural resources remains very influential over the mindsets of Emiratis. While there are differences between the seven emirates and their citizens, Dubai has moved to the post-oil model focused on economic sustainability earlier than the other emirates (Davidson, 2008). However, my analysis did not explore the differences between the emirates but focused on the participants' backgrounds and how their experiences influenced their perceptions and choices. The empirical evidence also illustrates how structural institutions influence young Emiratis' perceptions of education and employment. As discussed in Chapter 7, EYFG participants (particularly female participants) highlighted family restrictions, geographic location, and access to opportunities among the challenges influencing their choices.

My analysis of the rich and varied qualitative data collected during the document analysis, key informant interviews and the EYFGs generated new knowledge about young Emiratis' decision-making processes—this can be used to inform future policymaking in the UAE. Hall's 3I framework (1997) lenses highlighted how government's ideals influence policy choices. While policymakers emphasise the role Emirati youth play in policymaking, this remains top-down, limited in practice, and narrow in scale. This chapter also includes identification of the strengths and limitations of the frameworks when they were applied to the data collected.

The chapter begins by summarising the findings from my research. It then highlights the main conclusions from the interviews and document analysis using both Hall's 3I framework and the concept of rentierism, and explores how these could be used to improve UAE's policymaking as youth voices are still missing in policy design. The chapter then discusses Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions and the way they illuminate how young Emiratis make their education and career decisions. The last section of the chapter explores how the relationship between the government and youth could be leveraged in the interest of both, drawing on insights from wider literature. In the next three sub-sections, the main findings in relation to the three main research questions are briefly discussed.

8.1 Four main findings

1. The youth policy approach in the UAE is limited in practice and is unscalable. With it being top-down, highly controlled, and selective, there is a clear disconnect between what is happening on the policymaking side with its associated initiatives and what is happening in terms of the perceptions and experiences of young Emiratis.
2. The policymakers' rhetoric focuses on youth empowerment instead of youth development, an insight which was evident from the key informant interviews (see Chapter 6). While definitions of both could be argued, what has become clear from the document analysis, interviews and EYFGs is that the true focus of policymakers is not developing and empowering young people specifically, but engaging with them to instil in them nationalistic values and building them up to become good citizens.
3. The mindsets of young Emiratis, their family expectations, social norms, available opportunities, and structural limitations impact the way individuals make decisions around their education and career. In effect, an "illusion of choice" exists for young Emiratis rather than life and career choices. In practice, youth choices are limited.
4. Rentierism and late rentierism were apparent among the EYFG participants who had studied in the UAE, but less so among those EYFG participants who had studied abroad. Those who had studied abroad demonstrated higher interest and motivation towards developing their skills to secure future career opportunities.

8.1.1 What influences the development of UAE youth policies and programmes?

The empirical evidence on policymaking for youth in the UAE shows that policymakers are keen to instil loyalty and nationalistic values among Emiratis, while emphasising the importance of their contribution to the labour market. Although participatory in some ways, the approach to addressing youth challenges is still a largely top-down approach and is limited in practice. There was an emphasis from the government officials interviewed on how youth are the "top priority" for UAE leaders in addition to efforts and investments made for the benefit of the youth. Nonetheless, my analysis found

no evidence of how such evolution is being supported to build young Emiratis' practical skills and capabilities, both of which are critical for youth development. The policy approach appears to be aimed at building good citizens rather than at developing or empowering youth. I argue that there is a gap between the aims linked to youth development stated in policies and how *development* is interpreted by policy makers and policy practitioners has been illustrated through the evidence from the key informant interviews, where emphasis was revealed to be on engagement with youth to strengthening national values rather than practically building young Emiratis' skills and capabilities for the labour market or as participants claimed *empowering them*. This finding strongly suggests there is a gap between the policy discourse and what is experienced and perceived by Emirati youth. While the key informants emphasised the importance of youth development, the examples provided in the interviews suggest efforts which mainly engage Emirati youth rather than develop them.

Lastly, through the prism of the 3I framework, it became clear that the ideas lens was the most dominant in guiding policy formation. Here, loyalty, nationalism, and Emirati identity were identified as the driving forces behind policymakers' choices. The analysis highlighted the relationship between ideas and government interests, revealing an interdependence between the two lenses. In terms of the institutional lens, the evidence revealed that there are indeed efforts to institutionalise the youth sector, but no clarity was provided on how the different programmes and policies are being institutionalised. The analysis provided an evaluation of the pre-institutionalisation of the FYA programmes and policies as it did not tap into implementation and next steps, an area which could be approached in future research.

8.1.2 What influences Emirati youth education and career choices?

The data further revealed that despite the government's ambitions to move young Emiratis to the private sector and to entrepreneurship, there is also a complex and strong entanglement with public sector employment which could be rooted in the concept of the rentier mentality (see chapters 3 and 7). The sense of entitlement was visible among the EYFG participants, which does not necessarily apply to all Emiratis. For instance, there were participants who preferred the private sector, but these individuals were in the minority. The idea of private sector further relates to the social contract concept

discussed in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, evidence from the EYFG illustrates the high level of respect young Emiratis' hold for their family, leaders, culture, religion, and their national identity. It confirms that in the context of a collectivist culture, overall young Emiratis are conformist in their decision-making and continue to view their choices within the parameters of what the government provides and what their families and interpersonal relationships approve.

Moreover, the empirical data highlighted how societal perceptions of jobs were key in influencing Emirati youth's choices regarding employment. Male participants who went into National Service were also influenced by their experience, which for some encouraged them to continue their education whilst others were discouraged as they paused their study and spent 12–18 months in the military. As to the motivation for youth development, the exception was for those who study abroad. They showed stronger commitment and ambition to develop themselves than did the EYFG participants who studied in the UAE. This could be due to breaking out temporarily and partially from the familial and social constraints and being in different surroundings, which in turn might have broadened their understanding of choice and independence.

In her study of the transition of young people in Saudi Arabia, Almoaibed (2019) discusses the concept of *illusion of choice* and explores how social structures influence individual objectivity, making it almost impossible to free the self from surrounding influences. My research presents similar findings to Almoaibed's in terms of the influence of social structures on young people's choices. Based on data from the EYFG, revealed that young Emirati choices in the UAE are influenced by social, cultural and political institutions. I refer to these as structural institutions as they are the constraints which limit or enable individuals. All of these are external influences which nonetheless determine the young person's choice.

In line with Evans' (2007) concept of *bounded agency*, my research found individuals' choices to be highly influenced by their structural environments, beliefs, ideals, and social landscapes. Bounded agency refers to young people's personal lives, past experiences, and social experiences, all of which guide their choices. The relationship between structure and agency may oscillate between two extremes but choices are almost always interrelated with one's internal and external worlds. Bourdieu (1977) describes agency as living within one's habitus or field and suggests that agency cannot be separated

from structure as one lives in the socialised body, whereby the social becomes inscribed in the individual (Reay, 2004).

8.1.3 How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth relate to young Emiratis' education and career choices?

Interestingly, my research suggests that the UAE's policymaking approach is becoming more responsive to citizens through organised communication channels and platforms. The country's political structure requires identification of the appropriate balance between support and control, which I argue is critical to achieving its vision for youth and the economy. The analysis highlighted some of the government's communication channels designed for Emirati youth. However, these were seen to be highly limited in scalability and inclusion of youth voices, as well as insufficiently motivating for young Emiratis to actively engage with government efforts. The findings from the various methodological approaches used in this research can help to ensure that the development of policies aligns with, and increasingly takes into account, young Emiratis' perceptions. In other words, to ensure effective policymaking, it is essential to understand the horizons of choice for a young Emirati, how different they are for youth living in different areas and coming from different backgrounds (e.g., the influence of *Wasta*), and how they perceive their opportunities. For example, Hall's (1997) 3I framework provides an explanation as to how structural constraints through the institutional lens impact policy choices. This could be utilised in the case of young Emiratis through influencing familial and social perceptions around career and education choices.

8.2 The UAE pace of development and policy approach

The UAE's economic development began with the discovery of oil in 1971 but has gone beyond this sector more recently. As Hamdan (2019) points out:

In oil exporting economies, economic growth has tanked parallel with the plummeting of oil prices such that economic transformation through diversification is correctly viewed by economic policy-makers as vital to achieve a growth turnaround. At present, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stands out as a dual economy characterised by the juxtaposition of a natural-resource-based sector with an incipient industrial/service-based sector. With the former

shrinking, it is necessary to stimulate the rapid development of the latter, in a process of diversification, by moving toward a knowledge economy that encourages innovation via entrepreneurship to create wealth. (p. 65–66)

The UAE's vision shows the government's commitment towards escalating economic growth and prosperity in different sectors (see Chapter 2 for more detail) in order to enable it to compete internationally. Supporting this pace of development requires capable human capital, including both nationals and non-nationals, as discussed earlier (Chapter 2). Nationals, comprising approximately 11 per cent of the UAE's population, create an imbalance in its demography, with “salaried expatriates, who for many years have made up the bulk of the population” (Davidson, 2009, p. 118). This is why establishing a balance in the labour market is both critical and complicated and why moving Emiratis away from an overloaded public sector to private sector employment, as well as to entrepreneurship, has become a top government priority as stated (Emirates News Agency, 2024)

Achieving this transition in the labour market requires rethinking and restructuring the whole journey of a young Emirati, from education to employment, instead of the current attempts at addressing the challenge through a series of policy initiatives at the employment level (e.g., *NAFIS*). On the basis of my findings, I argue that a more effective and sustainable shift requires an attitudinal and perceptual change in Emiratis' career aspirations that should be encouraged from an early age through educational reforms. In order to fulfil the UAE's labour market and industrial goals and policies, there is a need to change the way young Emiratis view their future job opportunities, with the private sector and entrepreneurship seen as more attractive.

Most of the participants in the EYFGs indicated that the public sector remains the most desired employment option for mainly cultural and social reasons, with a few participants expressing interest in the private sector or in starting their own businesses. Changing the whole trajectory of a young nation would require long-term planning. That being said, my research concludes—as is discussed in the next chapter—that the government should look for other solutions aside from patching up the problem at the age of employment through subsidies or other alternatives.

The evidence suggests that there is potential for young Emiratis to view employment in the private sector more favourably. There was a lack of awareness and understanding among most participants about why there was a need for such an employment shift, indicating a case for improving the population's knowledge about the economic challenges facing the country. The change could also be slow and incremental towards building well-rounded, skilled, and capable Emiratis. The data revealed that young Emiratis are hesitant and fearful of the private sector and perceive the public sector as the safe and more comfortable choice. This research suggests that the pace of change in government and general population of young people does not exist at the same level and speed. Because of oil, the UAE Government developed rapidly, leveraging external capabilities and human capital as well as impacting Emirati citizens' mindsets. While this is economically beneficial in many ways, it is politically complicated in a monarchy and in terms of its stability. National human capital is critical to the UAE's growth, especially as the country moves towards a competitive knowledge economy. This takes a long time, and the process of upskilling and equipping young Emiratis cannot be rushed or addressed at the employment stage alone. While *NAFIS* may be effective in the short-term, forcing the private sector to employ Emiratis without a basis in merit and skill is not sustainable. A potential solution to this is to start development efforts through education from an early age, at the school level all the way to employment.

In the next section, some of the conclusions using Hall's lenses are discussed to amplify understandings about what influences youth policymaking. A few reflections linked to the policymaking process are provided within the context of young Emiratis' decision-making and how it could be made more effective.

8.2.1 Using Hall's (1997) lenses to understand UAE's policy choices

The empirical evidence revealed how UAE youth policies and programmes are often influenced by the government's values and its economic vision, ideals and norms, and how the institutional structures help sustain and organise the political and governance system. During the interviews, policymakers explained how the government took serious steps to demonstrate support for Emirati youth. Nevertheless, the data revealed that the policies and programmes are not necessarily serving the

development of youth skills and capabilities; rather, they are *engaging* youth in most areas (see Chapter 6 for details).

The FYA provides different communication channels for individually selected young Emiratis to connect with leadership, allowing selected youth to access opportunities which were unavailable before the establishment of the FYA. However, information gathered from the EYFGs revealed that the engagement between Emirati youth and government efforts is weak, as most of this research's EYFG participants lacked awareness about the policies and the programmes. Many of the participants were also uninterested in learning about them. This important finding indicates that there is an opportunity to strengthen the link between youth and government initiatives by aligning the focus of policymaking more closely to young Emiratis' interests and concerns, involving them more effectively in the process. Key to this would be a shift away from the current predominantly top-down approach towards one which is much more bottom-up (i.e., one that is more balanced in terms of the inclusivity of youth voices at a larger scale). It also points to the potential of adopting an evidence-based approach which incorporates youth experiences into policymaking, coupled with post-implementation evaluation to revise and improve policies as needed.

The document analysis and interviews demonstrated how UAE youth policies and programmes are focused on ideals aiming to preserve the Emirati identity and cultural values. In answering the first main research question on what influences the development of youth policies in the UAE, the ideas lens from Hall's 3I framework became the most apparent. There is a strong emphasis on strengthening Emirati identity, culture, and loyalty to UAE leaders—this guides almost all youth policies and programmes towards instilling certain values. Although policy incentives are focused on the ideas lens, this serves the interests of policymakers and the government. This means that the policies focused on instilling ideals and values are designed to mainly serve the agenda of the policymakers more than the interests of youth. The policy approach is focused on building good citizens rather than genuine youth development.

When it comes to Emirati youth, although some are active and engaging with FYA's efforts, little is known about how the broader pool of youth is engaging. The data and findings from the EYFGs provide helpful insights as they included youth from suburban areas, youth studying abroad, and males

in the Service. However, most of my participants across all groups did not know the Youth Minister, nor most of the policies and programmes introduced. Speculation behind this low engagement rests in how youth participation in policymaking is selective from the government's side, making it very limited in practice.

My findings suggest the potential for a more balanced approach in policy design which gives Emirati youth the freedom and ability to set and engage with the policy agenda. It was found that most of the EYFG participants do not see themselves as agents of change, neither are they motivated to play a more active role in the government's vision for them. An exception to this was that some of those studying abroad believed in developing themselves. Government officials emphasised that youth are the top priority for the UAE Government, but more practical communication with youth is needed to make this inclusive of the wider youth population, rather than a selective process.

Although my application of the 3I framework in this research differed to how this framework is typically used, taking this approach was helpful in many ways towards understanding how the three different lenses explain the motivations and reasons behind why certain policies were chosen. For example, the interest lens is usually used to explain how interest groups influence policy changes. This does not exist in a context like the UAE, and other Gulf states. What I did instead was investigate *whose* interests are served or more influential in the FYA policies and programmes chosen. The conclusion my research makes is that, because of the UAE's monarchical structure, the policies must serve the interest of the government in the wider scale. This notion was substantiated using the 3I framework. The other interesting finding was how the ideas and interest lenses overlap in the case of the UAE.

This could be distinct for the context of the study and countries with similar profiles, other GCC countries, for example. Some programmes were introduced to instil certain values and ideals which consequently also serve the interests of policymakers and the government. In this analysis, it became evident that the youth play a secondary role in influencing policy and programme choices, making it a highly top-down approach and rather unscalable and limited in practice. If tangible youth development is to be achieved, scaling up and rigorous evaluation of the efficacy of FYA initiatives are highly important. The 3I framework proved effective and applicable to a Gulf country, while showing small differences in its application from Western spheres. The 3I framework helped to find answers to the

first and third main research questions while supporting the hypothesis developed in my research on the limitations within the approach to youth policymaking. In the next section, I highlight the different usage of terms which came up during the interviews as they relate to concepts of engaging and developing youth—this helps to further highlight the gap mentioned earlier.

8.2.2 Youth empowerment or youth development?

While the previous section highlighted the visible government efforts to empower youth, this section discusses some important ideals and how they can influence policy choices. As discussed in Chapter 6, key informants repeatedly spoke of *youth empowerment* efforts while offering examples of *youth development*, yet these terms have very different in meaning and yield very different policy and programme choices. Hamilton et al. (2004) defined youth development in three different ways: the natural process of development, principles of development, and practices of development. Their book describes how the three ways are connected to building the capacities and skills of young people. The *practices* are the programmes and initiatives designed based on the *principles* of development, and these result in the *development process*. Hamilton et al. (2004) explain that development must be seen as a process, not a goal.

When this definition is compared with FYA initiatives, the *practices* are defined by the UAE's 23 policies and programmes. However, the question remains with regard to how these programmes are tangibly building youth skills and capabilities and how many are meant for youth empowerment versus youth development. There is a thin line between them, but a clearer set of goals would improve the design of each policy and programme. This is one of the key preliminary findings my research investigated further to understand how youth initiatives support building youth skills and are developing them to feed into the UAE's economic growth visions.

Interestingly, the term youth empowerment was used more than youth development in the key informant interviews. Specifically, when questions were asked about efforts towards achieving youth development, the key informants used examples of empowerment and engagement as evidence of development (see section 6.3). There is a misunderstanding here regarding how different these two concepts actually are. Therefore, the approach to each from a policy perspective would entail a different

process. As discussed in Chapter 6, Jennings et al. (2006) explore different models and conclude with these key dimensions of critical *youth empowerment* as follows:

- (1) a welcoming, safe environment, (2) meaningful participation and engagement, (3) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical processes to affect change, and (6) integrated individual- and community-level. (p.41)

However, Jennings and colleagues (2006, p.46) also note that power sharing is a challenge and that, “shared power may come most readily in smaller, localized sites where youth are fully engaged in the local community and risks are lower than in larger organizations” (Royce et al., 2004). The second dimension of meaningful participation and engagement is what I would like to highlight here. The UAE’s decision to institutionalise the youth sector and the efforts invested to engage youth offers a potential to empower youth to participate meaningfully in the knowledge economy vision (through the private sector which contributes to the majority of the country’s economy). This apparent discrepancy between the wider literature on empowering young people and UAE government aspirations may be resolved by focusing on the goal of young Emiratis sharing power within the commercial sector; a goal that could be achieved by developing their opportunities, skills, and capabilities.

I argue that given the government’s economic and labour market goals, the policies and programmes for developing and training young people in terms of their skills and occupational competences would benefit from redesigning to reach larger numbers. Youth development at this point is not occurring at scale given that only a few of the FYA policies and programmes could indicate efforts towards skill development. Additionally, evidence from the EYFGs revealed that youth development is discouraged by a sense of entitlement and by family and social factors as these encourage conforming to social and cultural values. A key finding from the document analysis and interviews was how the policy approach is focused on developing good citizens instead of developing or empowering young people in their careers.

These preliminary findings could be further explored in future research to understand the relationship and meaning of empowerment and development, how they translate into policy choices for

encouraging independent young adults with successful careers in the commercial sector, and how are they perceived by youth.

8.3 Youth perceptions on education and employment

Many of the EYFG participants expressed a preference to work in the public sector despite the different government efforts through *NAFIS* and Emiratisation campaigns to encourage greater participation in the private sector (see Chapter 2). The long-existing social contract plays a role in how it influences the perceptions of young nationals. Chapter 3 discussed how the social contract might have impacted the mentality Emiratis hold and how the rentierism might have affected youth perceptions. The findings from the focus groups show that the rentier mentality does exist among some youth but does not apply to everyone. Young people who studied abroad showed less rentier mentality than participants studying in the UAE. There are differences based on the experiences, backgrounds, and other factors that shape young Emiratis' perceptions (see chapter seven) Many, however, still show preference to public sector over private sector regardless of the government's efforts to change this view.

My second research question investigated what influences youth choices, and the mentality and ideals they hold are key to such analysis. As discussed in Chapter 2, holding Emirati nationality comes with taken-for-granted benefits of this citizenship. Thus, for the young nation, getting a degree is merely a step to secure a job in the public sector. Based on the empirical data from the EYFGs, employment in the public sector is seen as the expected and preferred destination for all nationals. In fact, the EYFG participants expressed the struggle fresh graduates face today to find a job and how difficult and challenging it is. This means they often stay in the Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) status for a long time, or temporarily settle for less by accepting a private sector job. Most participants clearly saw the private sector as offering a temporary job which would lead to employment in the public sector with better packages after more skills were acquired.

Notably, young people's perception of no job opportunities was focused on public sector employment, not all UAE sectors. This attachment to public sector employment is rooted in the concept of the rentier mentality (see Chapter 3 for details). Based on the implicit social contract, the government

is still seen as the primary provider of jobs and is expected to continue playing the same role. Data from the EYFGs revealed how many young people hold negative perceptions of the private sector, viewing it as highly demanding and culturally inappropriate. Some participants rationalised their resistance to joining the private sector with their inability to compete with foreign talent, or by seeing private sector jobs as not “prestigious” for Emirati nationals. These findings indicate that there is still a long way for the government to go to change the narrative and perceptions around private sector employment, which would also translate into Emirati youth making different educational and employment choices.

Moreover, my research does not assume that the social contract will simply vanish in the UAE since it is one of the main building blocks and a critical component of the stability of the political structure as well as the existence of the institution. According to Hertog (2023), “while there are other ways in which GCC governments share wealth with their citizens including energy subsidies, free education, free healthcare, direct welfare payments, and housing support, government employment is by far the largest channel of wealth distribution” (p. 2). Nonetheless, there is a need for social change or social engineering which could align the current government’s entrepreneurial vision for economic growth with building talented human capital not fully reliant on foreign labour.

The UAE’s dependency on foreign labour, given the current population imbalance, is a major challenge facing the country’s policymakers. The high dependency on foreign workers introduces political, security, social, and economic challenges (Al Hussein, 2021). Accordingly, with its small Emirati population, the country will not be able to achieve its economic and development goals. The complex challenge for policymakers is to continue supporting nationals while carefully changing the mechanisms and supporting tools for youth development and participation in the labour force. The social contract is essential to the UAE’s political structure as citizens are the minority and the country’s stability depends on national loyalty. The findings from the document analysis confirmed that substantial government efforts are focused on instilling nationalism and loyalty as well as strengthening the Emirati identity to maintain the ruler-citizen relationship (Gray, 2018).

NAFIS is an example of the government’s efforts to reduce the shortage of Emirati workers in the private sector, with these efforts including recruiting Emiratis into positions and imposing quotas and penalties on private-sector employers (Hertog, 2012; Marshall, 2018; NAFIS, 2022). The 2021

NAFIS initiative is effectively meeting the government's key performance indicators (KPIs) of creating 75,000 jobs by 2025 for Emiratis in the private sector (NAFIS, 2022). As discussed earlier, in Chapter 2, this will be achieved through subsidies paid to the private sector to employ Emiratis with specific terms and conditions which enhance financial incentives and other benefits. Whether this is a sustainable approach is yet to be explored, especially since the current timeline for *NAFIS* does not go beyond 2025 and follows a similar approach to earlier nationalisation efforts of imposing quotas in the Gulf region (Hertog, 2012). Given that *NAFIS* is a government initiative for Emirati youth which the FYA does not administer, this research did not look in-depth at the initiative and the details of recruitment and implementation. Additionally, with the UAE's population imbalance, state capitalism, and institutional arrangements, redefining the social contract and changing the participation of Emiratis in the labour market continues to be one of the biggest challenges the UAE and its neighbouring Gulf states face (Hertog, 2020; Gray, 2018). Thus, complexity remains in the state's ambitions to diversify away from oil and achieve its developmental plan to sustain the relationship with its citizens while ensuring the UAE's continued political stability.

In conclusion, the UAE's policymaking approach is becoming more responsive to citizens through organised communication channels and platforms. Yet, by activating the youth role in setting the policy agenda and balancing the policymaking approach to be more inclusive of different youth voices across the Emirates (e.g., by using them as points of evidence), the UAE could benefit from solving and addressing some of its structural issues. Guiding young nationals' choices around education and employment goes beyond the top-down limited approach with low Emirati youth engagement. By changing the dynamic and approach to designing youth policies and programmes, the UAE Government could benefit from larger inclusivity without undermining political stability. Emirati youth value the collectivistic culture, the family, the society, and the common perceptions regarding employment, all of which could be leveraged to impact their education and employment choices.

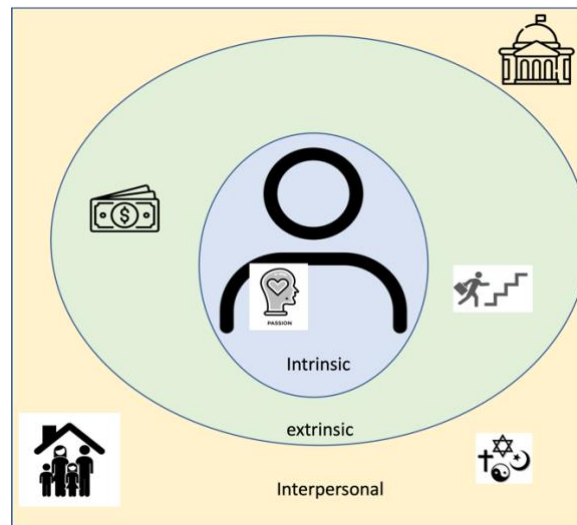
8.3.1 Intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal influences on Emirati youth

Young people's choices often come from their own experiences, as intrinsic factors highly influence their choices in terms of education and employment, all the while being mediated by extrinsic

and interpersonal factors. Emirati youth come from a collectivistic culture which values meeting familial and societal expectations at the highest level. Thus, even if motivations are intrinsic, the extrinsic and interpersonal influences are equally, if not more, important (see chapters 3 and 7). This applies to both young men and women, where evidence from the proformas revealed that most youth consider their parents as their role models, along with the Prophet Mohammad. To many in the UAE, Islam is the compass by which they live. Not only that, but the cultural influence of Islam is sometimes mixed with Emirati traditions, making it much more important than a religion they simply follow (Mohamed, 2019).

The EYFG participants highlighted how meeting expectations from their family, the society, religion, and the government are critical to them. The lack of alignment between these could create decisional conflict. Moreover, structural influences, such as the education system and available job opportunities, limit many of their choices, as apparent from the EYFGs as participants narrated their personal stories and experiences. Their choices are subjective and driven by their experiences in life: familial influence, social boundaries, *Wasta* or social capital, and cultural capital, all of which accumulate over years. That, in turn, impacts their perceptions of opportunities and aspirations and how they make their choices, limiting them in many ways and narrowing their horizons (see Chapter 7 for details). Figure 7 (below) illustrates the main factors (i.e., intrinsic, extrinsic and interpersonal) influencing young Emiratis.

Figure 7: Illustration of the intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions influencing Emirati youth



With regard to young Emiratis’ choices around education, there are clear differences and similarities between those coming from public universities, city or suburban areas, versus those coming from private universities, those studying abroad, and young males who spent time in the Service. As discussed in Chapter 7, their experiences, the limitations and challenges they faced and the opportunities with which they were presented, guided their choices. In a culture like that in the UAE, family support, connections, and socioeconomic factors are influential in determining young people’s trajectories. My research revealed the examples of two girls coming from different family backgrounds and social exposure, where one had to persevere and find her way to convince her Bedouin family to pursue her academic aspirations and study abroad, while the other one faced no objections from her family and received support from them from the very beginning. Those who studied abroad were different from the other participants as the sense of entitlement was not apparent, they were more independent in their choices, and they did not appear to be influenced by the extrinsic factors affecting other EYFG participants—that is, not equally affected by family and society constraints.

Finally, there were also differences in the opportunities available to young people depending on their geographic location. The UAE is a wealthy country with a small geographic area of 83,600 sq. km. This affords the government the possibility of offering the country’s youth across the UAE additional academic opportunities regardless of their place of residence. Nonetheless, female participants from a suburban area had only two majors to choose from and males had three options in

total. This is incomparable to what young Emiratis are offered in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah (the largest three Emirates) who study at the same federal university but across different branches⁷².

Chapter 7 also illustrated a gap in communicating youth policies and programmes to Emirati youth. Youth were more aware of the *NAFIS* programme, which addresses a main life challenge, than they were of the policies and programmes assumed by government to be helping to overcome youth challenges. The lack of awareness and poor communication associated with the FYA policies and programmes could be influential in how youth make their choices around education and employment. Specifically, young people must clearly understand their role in supporting the government's growth and why they need to develop their skills and capabilities to join the private sector and compete with foreign labour, for example. Moreover, stronger engagement and communication could help to change the sense of entitlement exhibited among those who have it and its entanglement with the social contract.

To conclude, my findings suggest that, even if there were a strong connection between youth and the government with its new policies, there are ideals which are deeply rooted in culture and cannot be changed easily. The empirical evidence indicates that young Emiratis are still not accepting the private sector or entrepreneurship as a permanent career. This could be a result of the structural demographic imbalance and the strong social contract Emiratis hold with the government (UAE Government, 2022). Therefore, changing cultural and social perceptions about employment and career choices may require a different approach to policymaking, one which aims to change the narrative and align with the government's goals through shifting the balance from a top-down approach to one which is even more inclusive. Youth, at the mass level, are yet to be part of policymakers' conversations in terms of playing a more active role in setting policy agendas. The next section discusses the influence of culture, family, and society which emerged from the data and how it could be used to inform and design youth policies.

8.3.2 A closer look at the cultural influence

Culture and society are two of the most important sources influencing Emirati youth choices. Adding to those are the backgrounds, socioeconomic and geographic constraints, as well as life

⁷² They have much fewer choices than their peers in the three largest Emirates.

trajectories which further shape individual decisions. For example, male EYFG participants shared their reflections on the mandatory National Service and how this enables or hinders their decisions around education. Every male participant who experienced the Service had a different story to tell but there were commonalities overall. The influence of the Service comprises more than one direct factor; rather, it is an accumulation of one's experience and social capital. This means that the Service played a role in influencing their choices around education and employment but also access to opportunities depending on the network a person has, the family background he or she came from, whether their parents are educated or not, and the age at which they entered the Service. All of these factors were found to impact their life trajectory and choices after completion of the Service.

It was further demonstrated through the findings that, in some alignment with Bourdieu's habitus theory, young Emiratis are highly influenced by the structural context within which they live, but that each individual's habitus differs (Reay, 2004; Bourdieu, 1990). In collectivistic cultures, the structural influence could be even stronger. Examples include family influence in the segregated universities their girls can study in and males in suburban areas not being allowed to work in a different city. The EYFG participants had different stories and reasons behind their choice of education, and many were limited to what was available to them—their choices were rather constrained. Young Emiratis view their choices within the parameters of what the government provides and what their families approve. Thus, the motivation to look beyond these opportunities was not apparent to the majority of participants. There seems to be a sense of satisfaction in conforming to societal norms.

It is helpful to extend my earlier discussion about the *illusion of choice* in Almoaibed's (2019) work and Evans' (2007) concept of *bounded agency*. One of Almoaibed's research findings highlights that young Saudis' education and career choices result from the social and cultural structures which frame their perceptions of "acceptable jobs" and their views of TVET. Similarly, the EYFG participants from my research emphasised the importance of conforming to social norms and serving the country, both of which young people perceive are achieved through employment in the public sector and meeting familial expectations. Thus, choices are not independent or free from external constraints, even if individual decision-making is perceived as personal. The extent of structural influence varies between individuals and between and within the same context, but they are indeed highly influential. The

interrelationship between agency, society, culture, and institution, and how the comparison is similar yet different for the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with many commonalities between them, is interesting. For example, the main difference between the two countries is the population size (more than 35 million in Saudi Arabia), with Saudis making up the majority of this number. So, the demographic imbalance in Saudi Arabia is smaller. Also, the geographic size of the country and the economic growth over the years has differed in many ways.

More than half of the EYFG participants perceived their choices as independent, even though in reality they were highly constrained. The rest saw their choices as the “only available opportunities”, convinced that those were their limits and so were unmotivated to find alternative options. They viewed opportunities as safe and acceptable choices in the eyes of their family and wider society. As a result, the idea of going beyond the structural institutions was not considered—that is, making decisions that are fully individual and independent based on what they truly want. The choice of studying certain majors or working for the public sector seemed to originate from a position of comfort and a seeking of the easier option, where “structures not only limit us, but they also lend us our sense of self and the tools for creative and transformative action, and thereby make human freedom possible” (Hays, 1994, p. 61). What influences young Emiratis’ choices are many factors, which my research was able to reveal and explore through the lenses of intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions and direct conversations, revealing how Emirati youth view and perceive their opportunities.

Furthermore, the attitudes of young Emiratis towards pre-defined choices could also be attributed to the rentier mentality, whereby citizens believe the government will handle all matters, even personal ones, further strengthening structure while weakening agency. The challenge with this is the lack of motivation in playing an active role. This research does not assume that all young Emiratis have a rentier mentality. However, elements of rentierism were apparent during the EYFGs. For instance, the majority of EYFG participants were keen on finding employment in the public sector and viewing the private sector as more demanding and less rewarding. Some of them explained that it is not *suitable* for Emiratis, neither does it fit the culture. Future research could build on this insight to further analyse the existence of the rentier mentality among younger Emirati generations.

The EYFGs also showed how societal expectations relating to gender influence Emirati youth choices of employment. For example, military and nursing jobs were perceived negatively for women, as discussed in the previous chapter. The rationale behind this negative association is that nurses work night shifts. Yet, the same male participants were highly supportive when I asked about female doctors. Female doctors also work night shifts. Thus, the unstated rationale is the negative social perception of females as nurses. Moreover, females in media jobs were also perceived negatively because of the social perception in the UAE about people in media. They explained that the surrounding environment is not suitable, even when they had not personally experienced the sector (see Chapter 7). This further demonstrates how complicated it is to distinguish independent, personal choices from choices determined by the structural context and cultural norms. Changing young people's perceptions could be facilitated through targeting policies and programmes earlier in their lives, with an aim to change some of the stereotypes around certain jobs.

When the UAE Government was able to shift the narrative around STEM majors for women it did so by constantly promoting them and making them more socially acceptable (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC, n.d.). Interestingly, a key informant shared her story of being the only engineer at the company when she joined more than 30 years ago. However, and according to a recent article in *The National* published in 2020, "44.5 per cent of engineering undergraduates are females" (Nasir, 2020). While the percentage is high, it is still unclear how many of those females pursued a career in engineering.

The previous section illustrated the complexity of the relationship between the UAE Government and its citizens, the implications this relationship has had and continues to have, and how it relates to the complexity in how Emirati youth choices are made. The individual choices shall be seen within the parameters of intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal aspects, which include the strong influence of a range of factors, including culture. Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework showed useful in understanding how youth make their transition choices. Similar to young people around the world, be it in the West or the GCC region, the three dimensions impact the choices a young person makes. The difference with Emirati youth rests within the impact of the interpersonal dimension, where it can be seen that collectivistic cultural values are deeply embedded within them.

8.4 Conclusion

To conclude, my analyses identified an apparent lack of awareness by young people about the government's efforts and their almost complete disengagement and interest. My research theorised rentierism, and the rentier mentality encouraging a disinterested behaviour towards self-development and aspiration, while promoting the idea that citizens believe they deserve certain opportunities which are not merit- or performance-based. The communication gap between policies and society is a challenge which policymakers face worldwide and is also seen in the case of the UAE (Thomann et al., 2018; Pfadenhauer et al., 2017; O'Toole Jr., 2000). As Hudson et al. (2019) explain, key reasons behind policy failures include weak communication strategies and ineffective design and implementation of policies. In the UAE's case, it is the design feature of the policies which could be improved towards achieving a greater impact.

If the purpose of creating the FYA and assigning a Youth Minister is not solely to instil specific ideals and values, then there is room for improvement to impact youth in ways which could support their development and their choices of education and employment. This could enable Emirati youth to take an active role in the UAE's economic growth vision. The key informants, as mentioned earlier, referred to policies as being solely driven by Emirati youths' interests. The empirical evidence analysed through Hall's 3I framework, however, indicated otherwise. It instead highlighted that the UAE Government's interests influence youth policies and programmes for political reasons. Notably, those initiatives were successful in instilling certain ideals and values in young nationals and strengthening their Emirati identity. Nevertheless, if policymakers wish to support youth development, redefining the approach to skill formation through policy design is critical.

Among the frameworks presented, Chapter 3 discussed Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework, which ties individual choices to the intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal aspects affecting their agency and decision-making. My analysis of youth choices illustrates how Emirati youth are highly affected by the UAE's collectivistic culture, which falls under the interpersonal dimension. Empirical evidence from the EYFGs and proformas revealed the high level of respect young Emiratis hold for their family, leaders, culture, religion, and national identity.

In the case of young Emiratis, agency seems to be a weaker influence on their choices than structures. This is not necessarily a negative point, as Bourdieu's habitus concept (see Chapter 7) explains how individual choices are influenced by environments, social experiences, and external factors (Reay, 2004). Culture, society, and the institutional order are all structural influences enabling or disabling individual choices. Participants observed that family support was the reason why they accomplished their educational goals. This support was the *motivation* which enabled them.

For the girl who came from a Bedouin family who opposed her goal of studying abroad, the story about the Youth Minister was sufficiently strong to reassure her parents. This highlights the trust and connection many Emiratis have with the leaders of the country. Meanwhile, participants from the suburban area showed how structural influences or extrinsic factors help explain why they were limited in their choices in terms of degrees and courses. Given the conservativeness of the families, studying outside their area of residence was not an option. The combination of limited opportunities, a structural factor, and family conservatism, a cultural factor, restrict the choices of Emirati youth.

Given that this research did not analyse evaluative measures or implementation processes, I do not intend to make claims in this regard. However, future research could build on this by analysing the process from policy design to implementation. This chapter intended to place the findings within the social science literature. The agency and structure in the UAE are unique to its case for cultural, social, and political reasons. The connection and trust Emirati youth have in the government makes it interesting as this is the foundation of the relationship, which could be leveraged in policymaking by maximising the bottom-up and minimising the top-down approach.

Influencing youth behaviours by leveraging the strength of social and cultural factors could be a useful tool for UAE youth policymakers to consider. Thus, the possibility of including more youth voices in policymaking and allowing youth to inform the policy agenda could be explored. The next chapter draws on this discussion to present recommendations and implications which could be considered for future policymaking in the UAE.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

This exploratory study provides a qualitative understanding of how policymaking decisions for youth are made in the UAE under the Federal Youth Authority (FYA), and how young Emiratis make their decisions around education and employment options. In relation to the former, evidence was collected from key policy informants and relevant policy documents, and for the latter through focus groups of young people, which included those studying in the UAE, in city and suburban area, those studying abroad, and males who had been in the National Service (i.e., “the Service”). Based on my research, I argue that individual experience, collective experience, socioeconomic background, and the surrounding environment greatly impact youth choices. While there are limitations to the generalisability of my findings, this research offers deep insights into how young Emiratis’ accumulated experiences guide their choices as well as how this demographic perceive and engage with government efforts for them.

Undertaking primary empirical research involving the two main stakeholders, key informants and Emirati youth themselves, enabled me to investigate and assess gaps or shortcomings in the policymaking process. It follows that my research outcomes can feed into policymaking for Emirati youth and help align the UAE Government’s aspirations with Emirati youth expectations and goals. I have argued that finding a balance between introducing policies while targeting behavioural and perceptual changes among Emirati youth could lead to better engagement, communication, and effectiveness in building youth skills, capabilities, and self-development through their choices around education and employment.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. It starts with a summary of the chapters and empirical findings, followed by information on the contribution of my research to the current knowledge base. It then discusses future areas for research and concludes with the implications of the findings as well as suggestions for youth policymakers in the UAE.

9.1 Summary of Chapters

This thesis began, in chapters 1 and 2, with an overview of the UAE’s demographic, political, and economic landscapes, with the latter including the labour market and education. It described and

contextualised the past, present, and future vision of the UAE and how it relates to the role of Emirati youth. The UAE's challenges have changed over the years. In the beginning, oil played a key role in its economic growth and accelerated development, with over reliance on foreign labour to fill the skills gap (Hertog, 2012; Herb, 2005). Over time, this led to a structural imbalance in the labour market whereby Emiratis, who are the minority in the country, saturate the public sector while non-nationals dominate employment in the private sector. This issue has been a major concern for policymakers and has underpinned labour market reforms, including campaigns to increase the employment rates of nationals in different sectors of the economy. Other Gulf states have faced a similar dilemma.

However, despite repeated efforts, the difficulty associated with changing nationals' patterns of participation in the labour market has persisted. The most recent initiative, *NAFIS* (meaning *to compete* in Arabic), has adopted a more extensive version of its nationalisation campaign. *NAFIS* involves a top-down approach which involves imposing higher quotas, fining employers for failing to meet them, offering subsidies, and enhancing benefits and packages for Emiratis to join the private sector. In 2016, and prior to *NAFIS*, the UAE appointed a Youth Minister and established the FYA to harness the potential of Emirati Youth.

Chapter 3 reviewed the theoretical concepts and frameworks from the wider literature relating to the UAE. This included discussion of the concepts of rentierism, rentier mentality, and late rentierism, all of which have been used to explain the situation in states that are reliant on natural resources for their income and economic growth. Given its reliance on oil, the UAE falls under this category. However, as discussed by Yamada (2020) and Gray (2011), it can be argued that the UAE no longer fits the traditional definition of "rentier state". The government's visions and strategies show the country's intention to diversify its economy and to move away from oil.

Chapter 3 also discussed the literature on youth transitions and decision-making. From this literature, I selected Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s three-dimensional framework to analyse the data I collected from Emirati youth. The framework has been used to understand how intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions influence individuals' career choices and transitions. The chapter concluded with a review of Hall's 3I framework (1997). I used this framework to analyse policymaking and

relevant policy documents in the UAE. The framework enabled me to assess and illuminate UAE policy decisions through the influence of three lenses: institutions, interests, and ideas.

Chapter 4 presented the methodological approach used in this research to address the three main research questions: 1) *What influences the development of UAE youth policies and programmes?* 2) *What influences Emirati youth education and career choices?* and 3) *How and in what ways do UAE policies for youth and young Emiratis' education and career choices relate to each other?* My research used a combination of qualitative methods, namely document analysis, key informant interviews and Emirati youth focus groups (EYFGs). Twenty-three FYA policies and programmes were investigated, 10 interviews with policymakers and policy practitioners were conducted, as well as focus groups comprising a total sample of 54 Emirati young people. The document analysis formed the base to guide the design of the other two methods and generate information which was unavailable in the publicly available documents analysed. The interviews and EYFGs were used to collect and help illuminate the voices of relevant government officials and Emirati youth—their experiences, perceptions, and thinking processes.

To address the first and third main research questions, chapters 5 and 6 presented an analysis of the findings from the document analysis and interviews, providing evidence of a top-down approach to policymaking. Specifically, despite the institutionalisation of the youth sector via the FYA, policy seemed to be designed as a way to manage Emirati youth choices through policymakers' perceptions rather than offering an inclusive space for all young people to influence policy. It was found that policy lacks the organic formation of youth forums and is highly selective in design. I mean here that youth participation in policymaking is limited in practice and inclusivity.

The FYA model has the potential to create greater engagement and connection with Emirati youth. However, through the application of Hall's framework, I was able to identify the ways in which policymaking has been primarily designed to instil certain government ideals to build good citizens, such as nationalism and loyalty. The ideas lens was shown to be the most dominant in driving policy choices. While the documents analysed made claims about youth development, they failed to follow the definition in the literature of *development* and showed inconsistency in the way which policies and

programmes are designed—some were more rigorously pre-institutionalised while others were vague for no identifiable reasons.

Chapter 7 explored Emirati youth perceptions about the appointment of the Youth Minister and government initiatives through the FYA and *NAFIS* to address the second and third main research questions. Use of Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s three-dimensional framework, revealed interpersonal factors as the most influential on young people's education and career choices. Overall, the young Emiratis interviewed were highly influenced by the country's collectivistic culture, whereby individuals were eager to meet familial and social expectations which conformed with a strong Emirati identity and loyalty values. Focus group participants lacked awareness about the Youth Minister and most of the initiatives implemented by the FYA. The data also revealed the role of *Wasta* (social capital) in providing opportunities for some Emirati youth and not others.

Chapter 8 presented a summary of the findings in relation to the UAE's pace of development and Hall's theoretical framework, specifically in the way the ideas lens has influenced policymaking for youth in the UAE. The chapter also explored a comparison between the concepts of youth development, youth empowerment, and engagement. The findings revealed that efforts, often cited by key informants, presented youth empowerment initiatives through opportunities for them to express their opinions, for example. This is done by providing platforms to engage with the government, but without necessarily providing opportunities for young people to develop their skills and capabilities. I argue that reliance on foreign labour will continue to be the case if the perceptions of Emirati youth about career choices stay the same. The government could draw on understandings of interpersonal and extrinsic factors to better guide Emirati youth choices. This could be done through using a different approach to policymaking to influence Emirati youth choices around education and career and which also relates to the government's visions and goals.

My findings provide evidence to support the presence of a rentier mentality among many Emirati youth. My research illustrates the usefulness of applying the abovementioned theoretical frameworks to the UAE's context. Further, employing the abovementioned frameworks has not been done before for the case of the UAE and applying them in this systematic way resulted in empirical

contributions to current knowledge. The next section discusses in depth the unique contributions my research makes.

9.2 Contribution to knowledge

This research has made a range of empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions to the academic knowledge. First, the study generated new empirical evidence about the Emirati youth policymaking process, which facilitates an understanding of the different ideas, values, interests, and institutions shaping policymakers' decisions. It also generated deep insights about the perceptions of Emirati youth and their choices around education and career in relation to policy reforms and programmes. With the government's recent initiatives for Emirati youth, an attempt at better comprehending the impact of those efforts is warranted. The evidence gathered contributes to the wider literature on youth transitions by illustrating how young people in the UAE are guided primarily by the social and cultural conditions which enable and constrain them in many ways. One exception to this was those who were studying abroad, who were able to mobilise individual agency to influence their choices more than the other participants.

For the purpose of this research, participants were selected to represent different segments of the Emirati youth population. The empirical findings showed that there is a certain lack of awareness about government efforts among Emirati youth regardless of their backgrounds (i.e., whether they are studying abroad, in cities or suburban areas, or are males who spent time in the National Service). This revealed the finding that a gap exists between policymakers' understandings of how and why youth make their decisions and of young people themselves. It would not have been possible to generate such insights using quantitative analysis alone. Accordingly, my mixed-methods qualitative analysis identified and shed light on a range of key factors which critically influence the effectiveness of policies and programmes pertaining to the UAE.

Secondly, although earlier theorists have explained rentierism and characterised GCC states as resource-rich countries, the wider literature is limited in illustrating how the rentier mentality is reflected among citizens. For instance, how does rentierism shape and influence the mindsets of young people? How does it reflect their behaviours and motivations towards their own development? This

research contributes to academic debates by generating evidence about the key role the rentier mentality has played and continues to play in decision-making among Emirati youth. Yamada (2020), Hertog (2020), and Gray (2011) argue that GCC states are moving beyond the traditional definitions of rentierism, while showing entrepreneurial traits with complicated structural challenges which should be addressed to increase effectiveness and productivity. My findings support their theories as the policies and programmes analysed and the key informants interviews confirm that the UAE is taking a different approach to diversify its economy beyond oil. This was illustrated through the examples of investing more in the education system, encouraging young people to join the private sector or become entrepreneurs, as well as by institutionalising the youth sector, and diversifying economic income.

This research provides original empirical evidence about the existence of the rentier mentality as it has been defined in the existing literature. It provides an empirically-based assessment of whether Emirati youth possess a rentier mentality similar in definition to the entitled mindset—that is, low motivation for work and reward but a high degree of entitlement. In this type of environment, citizens are encouraged to be politically passive and rely on the government to be the ultimate wealth provider in exchange for trust, loyalty, and patronage. It became evident from my analysis that the majority of Emirati youth in my sample believed that they deserved to get jobs in the public sector and indicated that the government must solve their employment issues. Hertog's 30-year examination of relevant papers on the GCC to assess for the existence of rentier attitudes through life choices, along with Kropf and Ramady (2015)'s work on different countries around the GCC to examine the presence of structuralised rentier mentality (which includes a sample of university students in the UAE) do evince a rentier mentality. My findings also reveal that a rentier mentality continues to exist. Many young people in my sample expressed high expectations that the government should provide them with jobs in the public sector. Lastly, given the similarities in the political and economic profiles of Gulf states, future research can build on the findings from this study to explore how the rentier mentality currently exists in different forms across the Gulf and the impact this could have on young people's mentalities and choices.

In relation to the wider literature, and aligning with the work of Jones' (2017),⁷³ my empirical findings illustrate the UAE's social engineering efforts and how nationalism strategies could have a paradoxical impact and further discourage citizens' motivations. In my research, the government's efforts dedicated to strengthening citizenship and loyalty values are seen as strong, especially in the policies and programmes analysed and through the introduction of National Service. My unique contribution here is in examining these points through a qualitative multi-method design which has enabled an exploration of how Emirati youth perceive and engage with the policies and how their reactions relate, or not, to the rentier mentality and nationalism strategies.

Third, methodologically, this research makes a unique contribution to research about the UAE by using mixed-methods design, which included different kinds of data generated from document analysis, key informant interviews and focus groups with Emirati youth. These methods were employed to understand and evaluate how Emirati youth engage with policymakers and policy practitioners. To the best of my knowledge, this research represents the first time this has been done in the UAE, an undertaking which expands on the work of earlier theorists investigating this under-researched region. My background as a policy practitioner in the UAE helped me to recruit elite interviewees who shared information about policymaking. Accessing this information would likely not have been possible had participants given responses in survey format, for example. I was also able to achieve a diverse sample of Emirati youth for the focus groups, giving voice to those (e.g., youth in suburban areas) who could be missed or not included in other research. The juxtaposition in the experiences provided valuable insights which can better serve youth policymaking in the UAE (see Chapter 7 for details).

Fourth, based on my literature review, the 3Is framework has not been used before in the GCC context or to analyse youth policymaking. Traditionally, the framework has been used as a tool for policy analysis in areas of health policies and in Western societies. My research contributes to the wider literature by exploring how different lenses and dimensions could be tailored to serve various contexts.

For example, Hall's interests lens is often used to refer to interest groups in democratic states who advocate for policy change. These do not exist in the context of the UAE's political system. Instead,

⁷³ Jones (2017) mainly used surveys and experiments in her analysis.

policies and programmes are examined from the interests lens through investigating the motivational factors behind policymakers' choices and how they feed into the interests of the government. To illustrate, policy choices must contribute to the wider interest of the UAE as the institution. The interlinked relationship between the ideas lens and the interests lens is one of the key findings from my research which was not observed in earlier applications of the framework.

Applying Hall's 3I framework to the UAE's FYA youth policies and programmes was both challenging and rewarding and, in the end, demonstrated its flexibility in being relevant in a policy, cultural, constitutional and political context such as that of the UAE. In analysing youth perceptions and choices around education and employment through the three-dimensional framework developed by Carpenter and Foster (1977), it was clear that the interpersonal dimension was the most influential. My research's application of this framework in relation to the UAE and young people's decision-making represents a first.

The empirical evidence garnered in this research could also be used to inform youth policymakers in the UAE. The country has the advantage of having institutionalised the youth sector through the creation of the Federal Youth Authority (FYA). There are gaps to be addressed, however, which could eventually lead to more effective results in terms of impact on the youth sector and, thus, indirectly on the UAE's economic growth. My research identified a gap between policy aspirations and rhetoric and the experiences of Emirati youth. I argue that by addressing those gaps, the government could build stronger youth capital through prioritising young people's potential, skills, and capabilities. Youth development is an essential component for transforming UAE's oil-based economy to a more mixed economy of advanced industry, manufacturing, trade, and service. However, UAE policy for young people emphasises their engagement with elite Emiratis to maintain nationalistic values more than young people's development or empowerment. Focusing on development would require considerable scaling of efforts to empower them to participate in the private sector and serve the government's vision for the knowledge economy.

The data revealed the importance of the influence of cultural and social aspects on decision-making and how policymakers could better utilise them to guide youth choices to support the economic growth and aspirations of the UAE. This research offers an evidence-based, systematic approach to

benefit the policymaking process—that is, by presenting rich qualitative evidence to help policymakers include youth voices in ways which would minimise inefficiencies in implementation and provide more tangible outcomes. Such outcomes would likely better serve policymakers and Emirati youth in the UAE.

That being said, familial, social, and cultural factors were identified as essential to how Emirati youth think and decide with respect to the choices they make. The role of these factors is illuminated through differentiating between intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal influences. The UAE has its own internal challenges and, as it progresses towards a diversified knowledge economy, a competitive national workforce is essential, inevitably changing the longstanding social contract. This research offers a space for policymakers in the UAE to explore opportunities which would provide a wider platform for Emirati youth to engage, while focusing on areas which could fuel the development of their skills and capabilities in ways aligned with the government’s vision.

9.3 Limitation of this research

This section highlights the main challenges my research encountered and the limitations these caused for my analysis. Such challenges included access to information, constant changes within the UAE Government’s approach, methodological limitations, time constraints, and ethical considerations. The UAE’s progress continues to be fast and steady, and that led to many quick changes. For example, the constant reshuffling of the ministers’ cabinet and changes within the government’s structure made tracking milestones more complicated. Therefore, and as explained earlier, the analysis was limited to the FYA policies and programmes within a specific timeframe between 2016 and 2021—that is, when my research was initiated. Examples of changes which have occurred recently include the FYA and Youth Minister merging with the Ministry of Culture in 2022. Further, in 2023, the Youth Minister became the Minister of Community Development. The FYA has also introduced initiatives which have extended beyond the policies and programmes included in my research.

Further, the pool of participants in my research, although diverse, was limited to what is feasible in the context of a doctoral study. The focus was on quality and depth of information rather than quantity, with an aim to draw out insights about the lived experiences of policymakers and Emirati

youth. My research might have gained from mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, which would have strengthened the methodological evidence. For instance, if it were possible to access the data on Emirati youth choices around education and employment for the last five years and then compare it with the findings generated in my qualitative research, this would have provided for a better understanding of how policies and programmes are affecting Emirati youth choices. However, and despite the Ministry of Education being the sponsor of my studies, access to quantitative data was not possible. Additionally, in light of the research questions developed, a qualitative study was arguably more appropriate. Another limitation was recruiting participants from all seven emirates; Dubai and Abu Dhabi were the main emirates where the focus groups occurred. There were participants from the other five emirates. However, their representation was limited.

Additionally, time constraints made conducting one-on-one interviews with the participants challenging. Individual interviews might have elicited more thorough data on Emirati youth experiences and stories, creating additional narratives. The approach to qualitative data collection and analysis has its limitations and is subject to bias. To minimise those risks, the interviews and EYFGs were undertaken with the data transcribed and translated by the author, highlighting potential subjectivity and selectiveness in the process. To minimise it further, different coding steps were followed, looking at emerging themes, managing the author's reflexivity, and occasionally reviewing the data.

9.4 Implications of findings

Even though it is claimed that policymaking has been developed in the interest of serving Emirati youth and unleashing their potential while resolving their challenges, my empirical evidence revealed a clear gap between what is said and what is experienced and perceived by Emirati youth. Young people who participated in the EYFGs, regardless of their background, were mostly unaware of the efforts made on their behalf by the government. This could mean that they do not relate to the efforts or that there is an issue in communication. Further investigation into the reasons underlying this gap would be beneficial. However, the findings confirmed that Emirati youth are included in the policy conversation selectively and that many young people in my sample felt they were not involved. The approach to include Emirati youth could be more consistent by institutionalising FYA policies and

programmes to follow the same steps. There is a discrepancy here that the government could address by taking different approaches towards addressing Emirati youth challenges, approaches which are more bottom-up and not as selective.

As argued, the findings revealed that Emirati youth are highly influenced by the interpersonal factors which shape their life choices, including education and career. Society and culture play a critical role in how young people perceive their opportunities and what is suitable, viable, and acceptable for them. The qualitative evidence could serve policymakers well in contextualising the policies and programmes to better align with Emirati youth perceptions. This means that even if *NAFIS* addresses the Emirati youth unemployment issues, a better understanding of Emirati youth, their parents, extended families, and society as to why Emirati youth choose their careers is crucial. Providing financial incentives and attractive packages are likely to be insufficient to address the roots of the problem in terms of preference in employment. Rather, targeting a mindset shift could be a more effective approach.

My research illustrated the complex entanglement Emirati youth have with the public sector, with conforming to cultural norms and meeting social expectations being major factors which impact the way they view their choices. Nonetheless, with regard to moving towards a diversified knowledge economy, theorists highlight individuals' skills and capabilities as main drivers of growth and employment (Chen & Dahlman, 2006). The findings indicate that *NAFIS* gives Emirati youth access to opportunities not based on merit and performance but via the enforcement of quotas on employers which advantage those who hold Emirati citizenship. Moreover, as highlighted by participants, *Wasta* gives unequal opportunities to some while others who lack such social capital are denied such access. This could be further explored to understand the role of *Wasta* in UAE society and its mid- to long-term impact on citizens' development, especially in skills and capabilities. Taken altogether, current solutions put Emirati youth at a disadvantage by making them less motivated to seek self-development and to compete fairly with others in order to obtain better opportunities.

In terms of using different frameworks to analyse the data collected, the findings revealed how, despite cultural, political, and structural differences, both Hall's 3I (1997) framework and Carpenter and Foster (1977)'s framework could be used in political contexts similar to the UAE. Although the

findings are not generalisable, the overall approach taken to analyse the data is useful. Hall's interests lens often advocated for interest groups who would push certain topics to the policy agenda, and this does not exist in the UAE, nor is it supported. As explained in the contribution to knowledge section, I applied the interests lens to investigate the motivations behind policymakers' choices of policies and programmes, as well as how they feed into the ultimate interests of the government. Moreover, my research findings revealed that ideas and interests could overlap and are interlinked in the UAE, influencing policy decisions. In the next section, a few final reflections in relation to the findings from this research are presented, as well as the implications of the findings for policymaking in the UAE

9.5 Final thoughts

My research revealed how Emirati youth participants navigate their choices through the lenses of social institutions and social expectations⁷⁴. The analysis of intrinsic, extrinsic and interpersonal influences on young people's education and career choices revealed some interesting differences. As explained earlier, intrinsic factors were the strongest among the Emirati youth participants studying abroad. With regard to extrinsic values, Emirati youth are attracted to career choices offering them recognition, better financial incentives and progression opportunities. This was evident in all the EYFGs and for males and females alike. As with the extrinsic factors, participants studying in public universities in suburban areas were more limited in their choices of study (e.g., accounting, quality management, and engineering). Lastly, interpersonal factors through familial and social influences influenced how young Emiratis make their education and career choices. Participants often described their options within the realms of possibility based on what their families and societies allow rather than making their own independent choices. In some cases, interpersonal factors overcame the intrinsic influences for Emirati youth to meet familial and social expectations.

Structures highly influenced Emirati youth participants' choices and the relationship they have with the government, with cultural values being key to shaping their decisions. On the basis of the evidence generated in my research, I argue that a policymaking approach which balances a top-down

⁷⁴ I use social institutions to refer to social structures, specifically structural institutions which cover all external structures influencing and constraining individuals (e.g., society, family, government rules, environments).

and bottom-up approach would increase engagement and enhance positive impacts, along with aligning the familial and social influence.

9.6 Conclusion

In the previous section, I explored a different approach to youth development in a country which shares many similarities with the UAE. Providing such an example does not necessarily suggest *policy borrowing* as a solution. Instead, a change in the approach to influencing youth education and career choices which could start from an early age and is aligned with government's goals and interests is proposed. This would likely be an approach which targets a mindset shift in Emirati youth opportunities, engages them more inclusively, and accounts for the interpersonal factors which are equally important in designing policy solutions.

My research hypothesised that policies and programmes cannot work on their own, nor do they always lead to the desired results—the reasons for this go beyond effective policy design. While the government introduces initiatives aimed at serving Emirati youth, two areas are yet to be addressed for stronger impact and engagement. The current idea of engaging youth includes selective methods and selected segments of this demographic. Would it not be preferable to involve young people who are representative of the whole Emirati youth population? In addition, Emirati youth development could include approaches to behavioural change through policies which focus on long-term changes, as exemplified by the Singaporean case. In terms of challenges regarding employment, moving Emirati youth willingly to the private sector depends on a change in perception. My analysis revealed that there is a clear disparity between nationals and non-nationals in the labour market⁷⁵, evidenced by both conversations with the key informants and engagement with Emirati youth.

Those socially formed perceptions could be targeted through a stronger evidence-based systematic approach to policies which target mindset changes from an early age, addressing the rentier mentality, social contract, and motivations directly and indirectly. Through the application of various concepts and theories, this research has laid out the challenges and possibilities relating to changing the behaviours of Emirati youth in ways which align with the country's goals and visions. The case of

⁷⁵ Patterns of participation in the labour market are reviewed in Chapter 2.

Singapore is cautiously presented as having a few similarities with the UAE. Given that this research did not thoroughly examine Singapore, the ideas are presented as speculations which could be further researched, serving as a potential solution for Emirati youth policymakers. Choices will remain subjective, but structures could help to shape more objective choices which align with the development of the self. Emirati youth are not yet ready for the change the government wants, and a way forward should be conducted through the development of policies and strategies which consider all aspects of the Emirati youth experience.

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<p>1) The government's vision and aims for Emirati youth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about the UAE's vision and aspirations for Emirati youth. • Given that the UAE has defined its growth vision economically, what role do youth play in that? • In your opinion, what makes a successful inspirational Emirati story for youth development? • As a policymaker, what changes would you like to see in young Emiratis' attitudes toward their education and career choices, if any?
<p>2) The process of developing UAE youth policies and programmes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk me through the process for developing policies and programmes for Emirati youth? • Who sets the process for youth policies and programmes? • Do all policies and programmes for youth follow the same steps or there are differences? Elaborate please. • In what ways, if any, does the policymaking process for youth policies and programmes differ or compare to how it used to be before the establishment of a Federal Youth Authority and appointment of a Minister for Youth?
<p>3) The factors influencing the development of youth policies and programmes in the UAE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your view, what factors influence the development of youth policies and programmes in the UAE? • How do different factors influence policy decisions? • What and who determines whether some factors are considered or dismissed in policy choices targeted at youth? (other than youth) • Whose interests play a role in policymaking and policy decisions targeted at youth? (other than youth) • In your experience, are there any ideas, values, and beliefs that affect policymaking and policy decisions for youth? • In your experience, are there any institutions that affect policymaking and policy decisions for youth?
<p>4) The major challenges and issues in the youth sector from the government's perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a policymaker, what are the main challenges you face in developing different youth policies and programmes? • How are youth challenges and issues defined?
<p>5) The decision of appointing a youth minister</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do we have a youth minister? • How do you see the general youth benefit from having a youth minister? • How do you see the government benefiting from having an Emirati youth minister? • How easily can youth access the youth minister? • What makes a successful youth minister?
<p>6) The youth influence and role in policy development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do youth influence the process of developing policies and programmes? • What role do youth play in the development of difference policies and programmes for youth?
<p>7) Main decision-makers in introducing new youth policies and programmes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the ultimate decisionmaker when it comes to deciding on the youth policies and programmes? • Who are the other major decision-makers who influence policy choices for youth?
<p>8) Main stakeholders in developing Emirati youth policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What entities besides the MOCY and FYA are involved in the policy development? • Are there differences in stakeholders' engagement between different policies and programmes? • How are roles decided upon?

9) The evaluation and assessment of effectiveness and engagement with the youth policies and programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the policies assessed and evaluated to measure their success and effectiveness? • How is youth engagement measured when new policies and programmes are introduced? • What happens if a policy or programme do not meet its expectations? • What are the accountability measures that follow the implementation of policies and programmes?
10) The effectiveness and main outcomes thus far from the youth policies and programmes in the UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main outcomes to date from the FYA policies and programmes for youth? • What outcomes are yet to be reached? • What is the one outcome that you, as a policymaker, is mostly proud of for Emirati youth?
11) The approach to revising and improving youth policies and programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If policies need revision, what is the process followed? • Are there any gaps that you see or notice in the policymaking process for youth?

Appendix 2 Proforma for key informant interviews

Section 1:	
Gender:	<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female
Highest level of qualification:	
Job title:	<input type="radio"/>
Length in post:	<input type="radio"/>
Previous work experience, if any	<input type="radio"/>



Information sheet for potential participants

Background

In line with the UAE's vision to continuously invest in its youth, build their skills and empower them to become more active in contributing to the development of the country, I am pursuing a PhD focusing on Emirati youth education and career choices titled "National Youth Development Policies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)" at University College London's Institute of Education in the United Kingdom, rated number one for Education worldwide. This research stemmed from my interest from my previous work experience at the UAE Education and Human Resources Council, where we focused on building and improving the education and labour market policies. Throughout my experience, I became more interested in understanding how the appointment of a youth minister in the UAE, the establishment of a Federal Youth Authority, and the different policies and programmes aimed at developing national youth reflect and influence Emirati youth education and career choice.

This study

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how the process of youth policies and programmes happen by engaging with the relevant policymakers and policy implementers in the UAE Government. I also wish to learn about Emirati youth choices, their education and career decisions, and how the policies and programmes relate to them. Based on the findings and by understanding policymaking processes in-depth and the motivations and attitudes of young Emiratis, policies can be better validated and implemented more effectively, as needed. This research has the potential to incorporate perceptions and behavioural rationales of youth into youth development policies and programmes in the UAE.

The study follows a qualitative methodology given its interest in understanding youth perceptions and policymakers' experiences of decision-making and designing policies for youth. The study aims to generate rich data that can be analysed thematically, support policymaking for Emirati youth and align youth choices with the UAE Government's visions and goals. Some discussions will be in focus groups, and some will be one-on-one interviews to allow in-depth understanding.

Your participation

In the interview, I would like to hear about your experience in youth policymaking, your thoughts about youth choices in education and career, and how they relate to the policies and programmes introduced by the Federal Youth Authority in the UAE. I would like to invite your perception, experience, and feedback to co-create our understanding about the reality.

I shall collect data in a form of interview either online or in-person, as convenient. The data will be stored securely and retained until 2026. Each interview will take between 30-60 minutes. I would like to audio record the interview or video record the interview (if online) so that I do not forget what you say. All data will be processed anonymously without identification of individuals to ensure privacy. I shall store the recording and our interview notes securely. They will be transferred and secured with end-to-end encryption and stored in an encrypted folder on a password secured PC. I shall not name you in any reports. By participating in the study, you provide an invaluable source of information that can contribute to improving ways of developing policies and programmes for youth development in the UAE through analysing whether a gap exists between policies and realities, the way youth see and reflect on them. At the conclusion of the study, I will alert you to any publications I have generated from the study.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw you can either leave your data with the study, or withdraw your data.

Local Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:

The controller for this study will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click [here](#)

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. I will anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide and will endeavour to minimise the processing of any personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Any questions

Please do ask us any questions you have about the work, before, during or after the interview. This study is supervised by Prof Sandy Oliver as the principal supervisor and can be contacted in case of concerns or further inquiries (sandy.oliver@ucl.ac.uk) at the UCL Institute of Education.

Consent form

It is important to outline the arrangements in place to safeguard your confidentiality and anonymity and involvement in the research, and to gain your informed consent before participating in the interview.

Please tick all the boxes that apply

- I am willing to participate through sharing my experience and perception about Emirati youth choices in education and career, and in relation to the UAE youth development policies and programmes under the Federal Youth Authority.
- I am willing for this interview to be recorded for analysis purposes based on my agreement with the interviewer
- I understand that I shall not be named in the report
- I understand that the interview recording and notes will be stored securely and encrypted on a password protected PC
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time, and if I choose to withdraw, I can also choose to withdraw my data if I wish
- I understand that the study's findings will be written, and then adapted for a thesis publication
- I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes from my interview in publications and presentations arising from this study

Name:.....

Contact details.....

--

Institution's Consent to Participate

I, the below signatory _____ in my capacity as _____ at _____ agree to participate in the academic study on young Emiratis education and career choices that is being run by Fatima Alwari, 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 its purpose, and the agreement to participate includes:

1. I agree to allow a group of students from my institution to participate in focus groups outside classes hours
2. Each student's agreement to participate is voluntary and at the student's discretion
3. Agreement or refusal to participation by the student shall not affect their academic achievements or their treatment by their teachers or administrators at the institute
4. All data will be handled confidentially by the research team
5. All shared information in final reports will be anonymised and students and institutes will not be identifiable in any way
6. Students' names will be changed and anonymised when using direct quotes
7. 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
8. The participating institute may obtain a final copy of the study if desired by contacting the researcher and requesting this
9. The institute's participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn from the study at any time without any consequences.
10. 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 Fatima.alwari.20@ucl.ac.uk +971501506000 or +447872855551
11. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints that were not addressed by the researcher you may contact the researcher's supervisor directly.

Dr Sandy Oliver Sandy.oliver@ucl.ac.uk

Name:

Date:

Signature:

This will be modified for different institutions to reflect the targeted cohort and gatekeepers in charge.

Dear xx

In line with the UAE's vision to continuously invest in its youth, build their skills and empower them to become more active in contributing to the development of the country, I am pursuing a PhD focusing on Emirati youth education and career choices titled "National Youth Development Policies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)" from University College London's Institute of Education in the United Kingdom, rated number one for Education worldwide. This research stemmed from my interest from my previous work experience at the UAE Education and Human Resources Council, where we focused on building and improving the education and labour market policies. Throughout my experience, I became more interested in understanding how the appointment of a youth minister in the UAE, the establishment of a Federal Youth Authority, and the different policies and programmes aimed at developing national youth reflect and influence Emirati youth education and career choice.

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how the process of youth policies and programmes happen by engaging with the relevant policymakers and policy implementers in the UAE Government. As well as learn about Emirati youth choices, their education and career decisions, and how the policies and programmes relate to them. Based on the findings and by understanding policymaking processes in-depth and the motivations and attitudes of young Emiratis, policies can be better validated and implemented more effectively, as needed. This research has the potential to incorporate perceptions and behavioural rationales of youth into youth development policies and programmes in the UAE.

The study follows a qualitative methodology given its interest in understanding youth perceptions and policymakers' experiences decision-making and designing policies for youth. By analysing thematically both sides, the study aims to provide rich data that can support policymaking for Emirati youth and align youth choices with the UAE Government's visions and goals. Some discussions will be focus groups, and some will be one-on-one interviews to allow in-depth understanding.

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 institutions in the delegating of:

1. I will need between 6-8 students in each institute who are in their third and final year of study
2. Each focus group will take between 60-90 minutes Students will be selected randomly and be from a variety of achievement backgrounds (high, medium and low)

May I also stress the following:

1. Students must consent to participate in writing (I will provide forms)
2. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout and both students and participating institutes will remain anonymous in my reporting
3. The focus groups should not interfere with the students' study schedules

I thank you for your understanding and support to my doctoral study.

Appendix 7 Sample questionnaire for focus groups

Objective	Question
Attitudes and motivations behind education and employment choices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being a youth yourself, what do you believe inspires and motivates young people’s education and career choices? 2. From your experiences, what challenges do young people face when choosing their majors and jobs? 3. What do you think are the most critical factors youth consider when choosing a major or a job?
Impact of Policies on youth education and employment choices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What do you think young people prefer when choosing a job? Private, public, or entrepreneurship. Kindly elaborate. 5. Seeing the government's vision for growth and development, what sectors do you think are vital for young people to enter and focus on? 6. On the mandatory national service, from your own experience or seeing the experiences of those around you, does the national service influence young males’ education career choices? Did it change as a result of the service? If you please can share stories you know or hear of. 7. HE Shamma Almazrui was appointed at the age of 22 as a Minister of State for Youth Affairs. How do you think young people felt about this announcement and related to it? 8. How do you think youth perceive the UAE youth development policies and programmes under the FYA in the way that they have/have not helped young Emiratis so far?
Impact of the institution and ideas/values on youth education and employment choices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Looking at the trends and changes in how young people make choices and set their life priorities. We have witnessed a change in the average age of marriage among young Emiratis. Nowadays, there is a noticeable delay among males and females on average. Why might the change have occurred? 10. What values do you think youth the upcoming generations should hold onto? 11. What career options are not socially acceptable for Emirati men to have? 12. What jobs are not socially acceptable for Emirati women to have?

Appendix 8 Proforma for focus groups

Section 1:		
Name:		
Age:		
Gender:	<input type="radio"/> Male	<input type="radio"/> female
Marital status	<input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> single	<input type="radio"/> Engaged <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Emirate	<input type="radio"/> Dubai <input type="radio"/> Sharjah <input type="radio"/> Abu Dhabi	<input type="radio"/> Um Al Quwain <input type="radio"/> Ras Al Khaimah <input type="radio"/> Al Fujairah <input type="radio"/> Ajman
Secondary education	<input type="radio"/> Public <input type="radio"/> Vocational	<input type="radio"/> Private
Father's sector	<input type="radio"/> Public <input type="radio"/> Retired <input type="radio"/> unemployed	<input type="radio"/> Private <input type="radio"/> Own business
Mother's sector	<input type="radio"/> Public <input type="radio"/> Retired <input type="radio"/> unemployed	<input type="radio"/> Private <input type="radio"/> Own business
Section 2:		
12. Please indicate your choice of major and university.		
13. Please give brief reasons why have you chosen this major and university?		
14. Would you have considered or would want to consider a different major? Please circle Yes or No		
15. If 'yes' can you briefly outline Why?		
16. What are your career aspirations?		
17. What is your top priority when choosing a job?		
18. Do you prefer public sector, private sector, or starting your own business. Can you give a brief reason for your answer?		

19. On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your choices so far? Elaborate please.

20. Who is your role model?

Can you give a brief reason for your answer??

21. Take a minute to reflect. Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

22. If you have completed your university requirement of internship, can you tell me about your experience and how did you choose the place you went to? If you have not yet completed it but are planning to, where are you considering and why are they your preferred options?

نبذة عن البحث

تماشياً مع رؤية دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة للاستثمار المستمر في شبابها ، وبناء مهاراتهم وتمكينهم ليكونوا أكثر نشاطاً في المساهمة في تنمية الدولة ، أسمى للحصول على درجة الدكتوراه التي تركز على تعليم الشباب الإماراتي والخيارات الوظيفية بعنوان "تنمية الشباب الوطني من خلال سياسات وبرامج الشباب في الإمارات العربية المتحدة" من كلية التعليم بجامعة لندن كوليديج في المملكة المتحدة ، وهي في المرتبة الأولى في مجال التعليم عالمياً. يأتي اهتمام هذا البحث من خبرتي العملية السابقة في التعليم والموارد البشرية في الامارات، حيث ركزت على بناء وتحسين سياسات التعليم و سياسات سوق العمل. خلال تجربتي، أصبحت أكثر اهتماماً لفهم كيف أن تعيين وزيرة للشباب في الإمارات العربية المتحدة ، وإنشاء هيئة اتحادية للشباب ، والسياسات والبرامج المختلفة التي تهدف إلى تطوير الشباب الوطني تعكس وتؤثر على خيارات التعليم الشباب الإماراتي واختياراتهم الوظيفي

هذه الدراسة

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو فهم طريقة وضع السياسات والبرامج للشباب الاماراتي من خلال المشاركة مع صانعي السياسات ومنفذي السياسات المعنيين في حكومة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. وكذلك التعرف على خيارات الشباب الإماراتي ، وقراراتهم التعليمية والوظيفية، ومدى ارتباط السياسات والبرامج بهم. استناداً إلى النتائج وفهم عمليات صنع السياسات بشكل متعمق ودوافع ومواقف الشباب الإماراتي، يمكن التحقق من صحة السياسات وتنفيذها بشكل أكثر فعالية، حسب الحاجة. هذا البحث يود دمج التصورات وسلوكيات الشباب مع سياسات وبرامج تنمية الشباب في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

تتبع الدراسة منهجية نوعية نظراً لاهتمامها لفهم تصورات الشباب وخبرات صانعي السياسات في صنع القرار وتصميم السياسات والبرامج للشباب. من خلال التحليل الموضوعي لكلا الجانبين ، تهدف الدراسة إلى توفير بيانات ثرية يمكن أن تدعم صنع السياسات للشباب الإماراتي ومواءمة خيارات الشباب مع رؤى وأهداف حكومة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. ستكون بعض المناقشات عبارة عن مجموعات تركيز، وبعضها سيكون مقابلات فردية للسماح بفهم متعمق.

مشاركاتكم

في الجلسات النقاشية، أود أن أسمع عن تجربتكم وأفكاركم حول خيارات الشباب في التعليم والعمل، ومدى ارتباطها بالسياسات والبرامج التي قدمتها الهيئة الاتحادية للشباب في الإمارات العربية المتحدة. أود أن أدعو تصورك وخبرتك وتعليقاتكم للمشاركة في تكوين فهمنا للواقع أود تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً حتى لا أنسى ما تقولونه. سيتم تحليل جميع البيانات بشكل مجهول دون تحديد هوية الأفراد لضمان الخصوصية. سوف أقوم بتخزين التسجيل وملاحظات المقابلة الخاصة بنا بشكل آمن.

سيتم نقلها وتأمينها بتشفير من طرف إلى طرف وتخزينها في ملف مشفر على جهاز كمبيوتر مؤمن بكلمة مرور، ولن أذكر اسمكم في أي تقارير

من خلال المشاركة في الدراسة، فإنكم توفرون مصدرًا لا يقدر للمعلومات التي يمكن أن تسهم في تطوير طريقة وضع السياسات والبرامج لتنمية الشباب في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة من خلال تحليل ما إذا كانت هناك فجوة بين السياسات والواقع، والطريقة التي يراها الشباب وينعكس عليها. في ختام الدراسة، سوف أنبهكم إلى أي منشورات قمت بإنشائها من الدراسة

لديكم حرية الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت. إذا اخترتم الانسحاب، فيمكنكم إما ترك بياناتكم مع الدراسة، أو سحب بياناتكم

إشعار خصوصية حماية البيانات المحلية

Notice:

The controller for this study will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click [here](#)

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. I will anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide and will endeavour to minimise the processing of any personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

أي أسئلة:

يرجى طرح أي أسئلة لديكم حول البحث، قبل المقابلة وأثناءها وبعدها. تشرف على هذه الدراسة البروفيسور ساندي أوليفر بصفتها المشرفة الرئيسية ويمكن الاتصال بها في حالة وجود مخاوف أو استفسارات أخرى (sandy.oliver@ucl.ac.uk) في معهد UCL للتعليم.

نموذج الموافقة

يرجى تحديد جميع المربعات التي تنطبق قبل المشاركة في الجلسة النقاشية:

- أنا على استعداد للمشاركة من خلال مشاركة تجربتي وتصوراتي حول خيارات الشباب الإماراتي في التعليم والعمل ، وفيما يتعلق بسياسات وبرامج تنمية الشباب في الإمارات العربية المتحدة تحت المؤسسة الاتحادية للشباب.
- أرغب في تسجيل مجموعة التركيز هذه صوتيًا لأغراض التحليل.
- أفهم أنه لن يتم ذكر اسمي في التقرير.
- أفهم أنه سيتم تخزين الملاحظات والتسجيلات الخاصة بمجموعة التركيز بشكل آمن وتشفيرها على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور.
- أفهم أن مشاركتي طوعية ويمكنني الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت ، وإذا اخترت الانسحاب، فيمكنني أيضًا اختيار سحب بياناتي إذا أردت.
- أفهم أنه سيتم كتابة نتائج الدراسة، ثم تعديلها للطرح
- أفهم أنه لا ينبغي مناقشة مناقشات الجلسة مع أي شخص بعد الجلسة لحماية خصوصية المشاركين الآخرين
- أوافق على استخدام الاقتباسات المباشرة مجهولة الهوية من الجلسة النقاشية هذه في كتابة البحث لهذه الدراسة

..... الاسم
.....
..... التوقيع:
..... التاريخ:
.....
.....

Appendix 11 Proforma for focus groups – Arabic version

Section 1:		
Name:		
Age:		
Gender:	<input type="radio"/> Male	<input type="radio"/> female
Marital status	<input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> single	<input type="radio"/> Engaged <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Emirate	<input type="radio"/> Dubai <input type="radio"/> Sharjah <input type="radio"/> Abu Dhabi	<input type="radio"/> Um Al Quwain <input type="radio"/> Ras Al Khaimah <input type="radio"/> Al Fujairah <input type="radio"/> Ajman
Secondary education	<input type="radio"/> Public <input type="radio"/> Vocational (مهني)	<input type="radio"/> Private
Father's sector	<input type="radio"/> Public <input type="radio"/> Retired – متقاعد <input type="radio"/> unemployed	<input type="radio"/> Private <input type="radio"/> Own business
Mother's sector	<input type="radio"/> Public <input type="radio"/> Retired – متقاعدة <input type="radio"/> unemployed	<input type="radio"/> Private <input type="radio"/> Own business
Section 2:		
<p>1. يرجى تحديد اختيارك للتخصص والجامعة</p> <p>2. يرجى شرح أسباب اختيارك لهذا التخصص والجامعة</p> <p>3. هل فكرت في تخصص آخر أو ترغب بالتفكير فيه؟ الرجاء وضع دائرة على "نعم" أو "لا"</p> <p>4. إذا كانت الإجابة "نعم"، هل يمكنك تحديد سبب ذلك بالمختصر؟</p> <p>5. ما هي تطلعاتك المهنية؟</p> <p>6. ما هي أهم أولوياتك عند اختيار الوظيفة؟</p> <p>7. هل تفضل القطاع العام أو القطاع الخاص أو بدء مشروعك الخاص. هل يمكنك إعطاء سبب مختصر لإجابتك؟</p> <p>8. على مقياس من 1 إلى 5 ، ما مدى رضاك عن اختيارائك حتى الآن؟ وضح من فضلك.</p>		

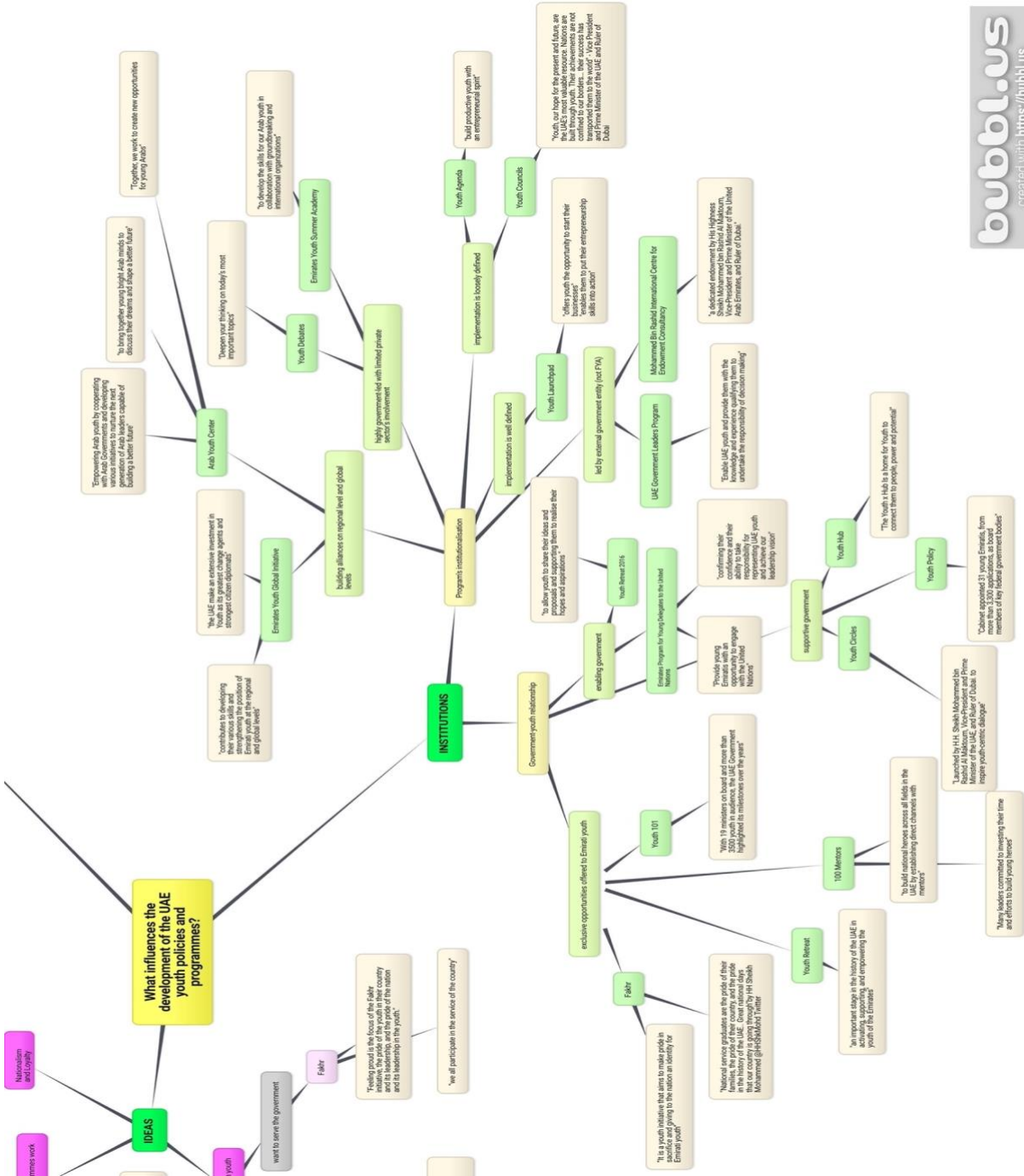
9. من تعتبر قدرتك؟

10. هل يمكنك إعطاء سبب مختصر لإجابتك؟

11. خذ دقيقة للتفكير. أين ترى نفسك بعد 10 سنوات من الآن؟

12. إذا كنت قد أكملت متطلبات جامعتك للتدريب المهني ، هل يمكن أن تخبرني عن تجربتك وكيف اخترت المكان الذي تدربت فيه؟ إذا لم تكن قد أكملت ذلك بعد ولكنك تخطط لذلك ، فأين تفكر ولماذا هي خياراتك المفضلة؟

هدف	السؤال
الدوافع وراء خيارات التعليم والتوظيف	<p>1 . كيف تؤثر تجربة الخدمة الوطنية على الشباب وما هي التغييرات التي ممكن أن تحدث بسبب الخدمة الوطنية؟</p> <p>2 . هل تعتقد أن الخدمة الوطنية تؤثر على خيارات الدراسة عند الشباب واختيار الوظيفة بعد الالتحاق بالخدمة؟</p> <p>3 . كونك شاب اماراتي، ما الذي تعتقد أنه يلهم ويحفز اختيارات الشباب التعليمية والمهنية؟</p> <p>4 . من واقع خبرتك ، ما هي التحديات التي يواجهها الشباب عند اختيار تخصصاتهم ووظائفهم؟</p> <p>5 . ما الذي يحفز الشباب على تطوير أنفسهم نحو تحقيق أهداف محددة؟</p> <p>6 . ما هي برأيك أهم العوامل التي يأخذها الشباب في الاعتبار عندما يتعلق الأمر باختيار تخصص أو وظيفة؟</p>
تأثير السياسات على تعليم الشباب وخيارات التوظيف	<p>7 . ما نوع الوظائف التي تعتقد أن الشباب يفضلونها عندما يتعلق الأمر باختيار الوظيفة؟ على سبيل المثال ، القطاع الخاص أو العام أو ريادة الأعمال. لماذا؟</p> <p>8 . بالنظر إلى رؤى الحكومة لتمكين الشباب الإماراتي وتنميتهم ، كيف يؤثر ذلك على وظائف الشباب؟ هل ترى أي فرق قبل وبعد هذا التركيز من خلال تعيين وزير شباب وتأسيس مؤسسة اتحادية للشباب مثلاً؟</p> <p>9 . في رأيك ، ما مدى تفاعل الشباب مع برامج المؤسسة الاتحادية للشباب؟ هل الشباب على علم بجميع ال ٢٣ برنامج وسياسة ويتفاعلون معها؟ هل تجدها مفيدة؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فبأي طرق؟ إذا كانت الإجابة "لا" ، فلماذا؟ ماذا قد يكون السبب؟</p> <p>10 . ما هي التغييرات أو التطورات التي تعتقد أن الشباب سيرغبون في رؤيتها مقدمة من المؤسسة الاتحادية للشباب الإماراتيين؟</p>
تأثير المؤسسة ، والأفكار ، والقيم على تعليم الشباب وخيارات التوظيف	<p>11 . من خلال النظر إلى الاتجاهات والتغيرات في الطريقة التي يتخذ بها الشباب خياراتهم وتحديد أولويات حياتهم. لقد شهدنا تغييراً في متوسط سن الزواج بين الشباب الإماراتي. في الوقت الحاضر ، هناك تأخر ملحوظ بين الذكور والإناث في المتوسط العمري للزواج. ماذا قد يكون سبب هذا التغيير؟</p> <p>12 . ما هي القيم التي تعتقد أنه يجب على الشباب في الأجيال القادمة التمسك بها؟ ما هي القيم والمثل الهامة للشباب الإماراتي؟</p> <p>13 . ما هي الخيارات الوظيفية غير المقبولة اجتماعياً للرجال الإماراتيين؟</p> <p>14 . ما هي الوظائف غير المقبولة اجتماعياً للمرأة الإماراتية؟</p>



Appendix 14 Number of students by level of education and gender

Time period		2020	2020	2020
		Male	Female	Total
Level of Education				
Short Cycle Tertiary		9,644	5,603	15,247
Bachelor		135,109	119,736	254,845
Masters		13,699	8,479	22,178
PHD's or Equivalent		2,916	771	3,687
Total		161,368	134,589	295,957

Appendix 15 Estimated total youth population between 15-24 years old

Emirate	The total population in Million	Total Emirati population	Estimated Youth Population % (15-24)
Abu Dhabi	3.23	370,804	47,1
Dubai	3.32	381,136	48,4
Sharjah	1.51	173,348	22,015
Ajman	0.54	61,992	7,9
Ras al-Khaimah	0.39	44,772	5,7
Fujairah	0.25	28,700	3,64
Umm al-Quwain	0.08	9,184	1,17
Total	9.32	1.07 M	135,9

Estimated total UAE population in 2018: 9.54M
Estimated total Emiratis percentage: 11.48%
Estimated total Emiratis population: 1.1M
Estimated total youth percentage (15-24): 12.7% ⁷⁶

Source: <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/>

⁷⁶ This represents the estimated total population percentage of youth in each Emirate based on the available information of the total Emirati population from the overall country's population divided by the Emirate total population since segmentation by national youth across Emirates was not available from the official UAE Government websites.

Appendix 16 Percentage distribution of employed persons (15 years and over) by nationality, gender, and occupation

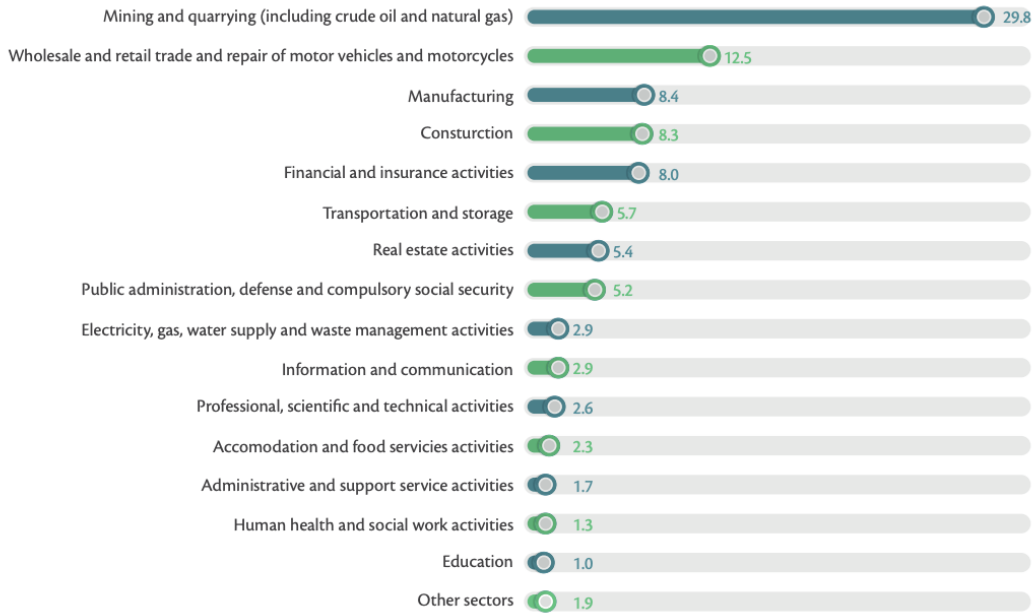
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Citizenship</i>	Non-Emirati		Total	Total		Total
	<i>Gender</i>	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Managers		9.8	8.3	9.4	9.9	8.5	9.5
Professionals		13.8	20.2	15.3	13.9	21.0	15.6
Technicians and associate professionals		11.2	8.6	10.6	11.8	9.4	11.2
Clerical support workers		3.7	6.5	4.4	3.9	7.6	4.8
Service and sales workers		14.9	13.9	14.7	15.4	13.5	15.0
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers		1.2	..	0.9	1.2	..	0.9
Craft and related trades workers		19.2	0.2	14.7	18.5	0.2	14.1
Plant and machine operators, and assemblers		12.2	0.3	9.4	11.9	0.3	9.1
Elementary occupations		13.8	41.7	20.4	13.4	39.2	19.6
Not Stated		0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

© Percentage distribution of Employed Persons (15 years and over) by Nationality, Gender and Occupation 

Source: Federal Authority for Competitiveness and Statistics

Appendix 17 Sectoral distribution of GDP at constant prices for 2019 (%)

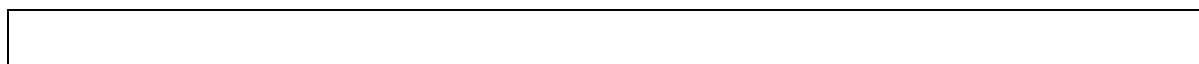
Figure 04 Sectoral distribution of GDP at constant prices for 2019 (%)



Source: Federal Authority for Competitiveness and Statistics

Appendix 18 UAE Vision 2021





- UAE population including expats is estimated at 9.99 million. The total expat population in UAE is around 8.84 million, which constitutes approximately 89% of the population. Emiratis are around 11% or 1.15 million of the total population.

UAE Population by Age (nationals and expats)

Age Group	Population	Percentage
0-14	1.4 Million	14.95%
15-24	1.1 Million	11.80%
25-54	6.6 Million	66.35%
55-64	0.5 Million	5.80%
65+	0.1 Million	1.10%

Source: <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/>

UAE Population by Gender (nationals and expats)

Age Group	Women	Men	Total
0-14 years	0.73 million	0.76 million	1.49 million
15-24 years	0.43 million	0.74 million	1.17 million
25-54 years	1.75 million	4.85 million	6.60 million
55-64 years	0.14 million	0.44 million	0.58 million
65 years and over	0.04 million	0.07 million	0.11 million

Source: <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/>

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