



Assessing Attitudes towards Career Guidance in Public Girls' Schools in the United Arab Emirates: Practices and Challenges

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Received 27 Jan. 2019, Revised 22 March 2019, Accepted 27 Feb. 2019, Published 01 July 2019

Abstract: This study explores the impact of career guidance in preparing Emirati female students for the job market in Dubai. We explore the extent to which public schools are preparing students, highlight some of the challenges in the quality of services for career selection, and the role of the school social worker in the preparation phase. School Social workers have an important role to play in ensuring that students are well equipped with the right knowledge, skills and competencies to select a career path. Findings and recommendations are based on the feedback from the school social worker and students with the intention of improving career guidance in girls' schools. Implications include recommendations in adopting a structured and coherent curriculum, providing tailor made career guidance sessions in addition to motivating and encouraging the recruitment of more female career guidance officers. The findings highlight the need to improve collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Education and schools in order to redesign career guidance programs at the higher education level to address the shortage of career guidance officers in schools, in addition to raising awareness amongst parents, which would mean encouraging more enrolments to higher education specializing in career guidance. Strategies such as shadow work, work experience placements will give students exposure to work in real life work environments and creating web-portals to provide online career guidance services. Such implications are important as they may contribute to the preparation of Emirati girls' for the job market and to successfully serve their country.

Keywords: Career guidance officers, public schools, social workers, Ministry of Education, Dubai

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has created its vision precisely to prepare students for the job market prior to enrolment in higher education. Their mission is "Pioneering in student preparation in K-12 education for a productive life in a dynamic world to ensure sustainable development for UAE society" (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, n.d.). The vision of the MOE is also aligned to its strategic initiatives considering student outcomes, which mainly focus on the curriculum. Therefore, one of the most significant initiatives planned by MOE is to "Develop curricula and align with Higher Education and Job Market Requirements" (The United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, n.d., p.3). Career guidance is essential to ensure that students gain proper knowledge and skills for the job market in the region. However, the impact of career guidance in Dubai public secondary schools is still limited, and requires more exploration to

achieve the strategic initiatives of the MOE for the current decade (2010-2020).

Today, students are given the opportunities to career fairs, field visit to several different universities to explore careers that might interest them. For instance, those interested in the legal system can visit a courtroom to hear an actual case. However, often students have given little thought to, their goals or future career. Additionally, they may be unaware of the needs of the job market, careers that might suit them, and/or lack the required training and skills. If all these concerns are still facing students in secondary schools today, then there is an obvious gap in the availability of career guidance.

From experience, we have found that although career guidance follows a better approach nowadays than it did many years ago, it still does not effectively take students through a gradual and systematic process. This study will explore career guidance for Emirati female students in secondary public schools in Dubai, in the hope that the findings will also shed light on the



importance of training and employing career guidance officers in secondary schools, to help students plan their careers and contribute to the development of UAE society. In specific, this study will attempt to answer the following question:

What are the perceptions of social workers and students towards career guidance support provided by public schools in Dubai?

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) Examine the impact of career guidance in Dubai secondary schools in helping students to select their career paths successfully.
- 2) Assess the extent to which the Ministry of Education vision and strategic initiative supports career guidance in schools.
- 3) Explore the effectiveness of communication between public schools and other institutions, which provide practical work placement opportunities for students.
- 4) Raise awareness of the importance of career guidance in preparing students for their futures
- 5) Propose creative solutions for enhancing career guidance in public schools.
- 6) Raise awareness of the importance of developing a sustainable link between public schools and universities, to offer an aligned curriculum related to the job market requirements.
- 7) Increase the recruitment of Emirati teachers with an expertise in career guidance.

Dubai, an influential emirate in the United Arab Emirates, has moved rapidly to achieving prosperity for its citizens. Smart education is the primary strategy towards the development of the UAE nation. This research will explore to what extent the UAE national outcomes can be achieved through effective career guidance. Students may lose track when studying many subjects at once, like Geography, History, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, as well as Islamic Studies, Arabic, English, and Math, without knowing how to apply them in real-life situations or understanding their significance for career qualification. Effective career guidance means students discover themselves at an earlier stage, at the secondary school level, and can plan for their further education and career, and become more successful and productive members of society.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Career guidance is a method of facilitating individuals who are searching for a job or position by considering their style and personality (McKay, n.d.). It can be also provided to those who are aiming to change their position or have already lost their current jobs (McKay, n.d.). The Organization for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD), the European Commission and the World Bank has defined career guidance as follows:

‘Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self-awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmed, and transition services’ (OECD/European Communities, 2004, p. nn).

However, this study focuses on career guidance as an approach to providing services that specifically support secondary school students in choosing their career paths prior to enrolling in a special major as an undergraduate university student and before making a random decision towards selecting a career. As career guidance is a profession by itself, they are responsible for providing career guidance services in order to prepare students for selecting their future careers (Rashid & Bakar, 2010).

Some educators (e.g., Bezanson & Hiebert, 1997; Dickson, 1995; Team Canada, 2000) believe that career guidance should start from an earlier stage as to allow secondary school students to get ready for their future and understand what they want to do next (cited in Bloxom et. al., 2008, p.81). In many countries, career guidance begins at university or college level while some educators believe that this is too late, since students should have a clear idea about their future at an earlier stage and before they graduate from high school (Drier, 2000, p.74). Some people also deem that it is meaningless to study many school subjects that are considered aspects of knowledge without exploring the skills and practices that can help in making them active members of society (Farah & Ridge, 2009). ‘General education’ as a standalone is not the only way to improving people’s lives and this why career education must be integrated into high schools where students are able to contextualize themselves (Farah & Ridge, 2009). They also become aware at this stage of making decisions that will help them in planning for their future



as they discover their personalities and competencies (Drier, 2000).

According to Bloxom et al. (2008), many educators agree on the importance of implementing career guidance, especially in high school. This is due to the fact that students are more likely to be motivated to attend school if there are extra-curricular activities or programs that guide them through their future careers (Bezanson & Hiebert; 2007; Dickson, 1995; Team Canada, 2000) as cited in (Bloxom et. al., 2008, p.81). Khawasneh (2010, p.41) stated that students reported that they are not sure about what to be in the future. He has also reported with other researchers that the lack of career guidance in secondary schools 'has contributed to the rise in the number of high school drop-outs and has prolonged the rate of university completion' (Khasawneh, Khasawneh, Hailat & Jawarneh, 2007, p.41). Thus, career guidance is one way of helping to motivating students to pursue high school studies and consider life-long learning as a priority that will hopefully have a positive impact on prospering their lives.

An article posted in a CareersGiant website mentioned that high school students are considering their future career in their school environment more than at any other stage of their life. This will lead them to save their time and effort for searching for a career or profession after graduating from high school. Such pre-plans are effective in creating ready individuals who are willing to take charge in the development of their own life, their families' lives, and therefore to the progress of their society. It is believed that career guidance plays an important role in 'making the recruitment process work more smoothly (by reducing the number of unrealistic applications, and better highlighting the qualities of suitable candidates), and improving productivity (by contributing to job satisfaction, thereby reducing employee turnover)' (CareersGiant, n.d.). National citizens will be able to reach self-actualization, which is the last step in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as a result of being prepared for their mission from an early age. That will lead to understanding the requirements of the job market in order to find a suitable job rather than waiting for a couple more years before finding a vacant job or receiving a low income or salary in a position of a lower level and at the same time that mismatches the individuals' profession of study.

Previous reviews demonstrate a number of perceptions and evidences from teachers and students in public schools who emphasized that career guidance officers were not available in UAE schools until the year 2011 (Brattle, 2011). This idea became prevalent when "experts called for more career guidance in schools after a survey found most Emirati boys want to follow their

fathers into public jobs - although girls are more likely to aim for private-sector careers" (Brattle, 2011). Therefore, specialist educators in the ministry of education created a sense of urgency towards considering career guidance in their plans and announced that it would be fully implemented during the five years from 2012-2017 (Swan, 2012). Jaffar Fardan, a researcher and head teacher in a public school in Dubai stated that "job advice in schools usually came from social workers, who were experts at dealing with problem children or family issues such as financial hardship but were not qualified to be career counsellors" (Brattle, 2011).

Some students who were studying in public schools in the UAE and are currently working in the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) have reported that career guidance was not offered to them while they were in secondary schools (Brattle, 2011). Tariq Ali (25 years), who was studying in a public school in the UAE stated, "I had no careers counselling at school, and I am at KHDA because I saw a leaflet with a list of the jobs available there" (Brattle, 2011). Ahmed Buhumaid (22 years) who has graduated from a public school announced, "I worked in summer jobs through my high school years in banks, and I worked through college as a work placement to pass my courses. I did not get career guidance at school, in fact I didn't think about what job I would do." He also added, "You have to be at work for a long time, so it is important to get help from a professional counsellor" (Buhumaid cited in Brattle, 2011). Shamma Al Mansouri (28 years) is a female who has also expressed her thoughts about career guidance in UAE schools as she announced, "My mum, dad and uncles helped me. My school only talked about me being a teacher, but I wanted to go into business" (Brattle, 2011). These examples of national citizens demonstrated a great demand for providing career guidance officers in UAE schools to assist the generations in effectively identifying and selecting their future career paths. However, the ministry of education in UAE has realized recently that career guidance is necessary in UAE public schools, not only for secondary-school students, but also starting from the elementary level. Brattle (2011) stated in his article that some researchers suggested that the most appropriate age to understand your future steps is between 8 and 11 years old.

Alsabaey (2012) projected that the first phase will consider the elementary level that concentrates on self-development through improving the students' academic and communication skills. The second phase targets middle school students and it will focus on the academic development through building the students' cognitive and performance skills. The third and last phase targets the secondary school students and it will concentrate more on the students' professional development through raising



awareness of the requirements of the job market and various effective ways in selecting appropriate courses and specializations. She has also mentioned that the ministry is currently working on the third phase and will transfer to the first and second phases in the future; taking into account that career guidance will be fully implemented in UAE public schools by the year 2017. Alsabaey (2012) also proclaimed that this project consists of various events and activities, such as some periods for career guidance, individual and group guidance sessions, workshops, lectures, seminars, and summer training sessions. Additionally, she gave assurances that this project will include a variety of activities that shall prepare the students for their future careers considering the variations of their ages, personalities, and preferences (reported by Alsabaey, 2012).

As researchers, we are optimistic about the effectiveness of career guidance that the Ministry of Education will provide to graduate students who are preparing for the job market in the UAE. However, the questions that need further attention are; how can career guidance be implemented effectively within the curriculum and with the heavy load with wide range number of subjects being studied.

Career Guidance Theories

Many theories have been developed to answer the questions: 'How can individuals be guided to select their careers?', 'What is the most suitable age to start career guidance?', and 'What are the best practices and implications that can support career guidance programs?' Accordingly, theories of career guidance, such as Matching theories, Developmental theory, and Community Interaction Theory are worth explaining below.

Matching Theories (Trait/factor)

Matching theories consist of various approaches that have developed over time, considering the idea of discovering the individual's personality by a professional and matching it to the most appropriate type of work (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008). This theory started when Parsons (1908) created the approach of talent matching in 1908, "which was subsequently developed into the trait and factor theory of occupational choice within the evolving discipline of differential psychology" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.8). He mentioned in his approach that people can select their career effectively if they are able to create 'an accurate understanding of their individual traits', get 'knowledge of jobs and the labour market'; and formulate 'a rational and objective judgment about the relationship between these two groups of facts' (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.8).

Then, Rodger (1952) reviewed the approach that Parsons had started calling it "Seven Point Plan" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.8). 'It consists of seven attributes: physical characteristics, attainments, general intelligence, specialized aptitudes, interests, disposition and circumstances' (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.8). This approach can be put into practice through conducting "first, an evaluation of jobs against these seven attributes; second, assessment of an individual client against these seven attributes to ascertain the extent to which the client is a 'good fit' (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.9). An individual can subsequently select his/her career path after creating a link between the two above variables. After that, 'Holland (1966, 1973, 1985, 1992) developed an occupational classification system that categorizes personalities and environments into six model types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.9). In this case, individual personalities can be selected according to the previous six types. Then, work environments can also be linked to the six addressed types above. Accordingly, job seekers can select the jobs that match their personalities' style (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.9).

Developmental Theory

The developmental theory can be defined as 'the process of helping a person to develop and accept an integrated and adequate picture of themselves and of their role in the world of work. A central concept is that people develop through stages over their lifetime' (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.14). Eli Ginzberg and Donald Super are the founders of this theory of career guidance.

'Ginzberg et al. (1951) proposed three life stages, which broadly corresponded with chronological age' (cited in ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.14). The first stage is the "fantasy stage" and it considers children of ages between 0-11. Thus, it only targets those who are in pre-school to elementary school levels. Then comes "the tentative stage" which targets those who are 11-17 years old 'with the three sub-stages of interest, capacity, and value' (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.14). Accordingly, those who are attending middle and high school will be amongst the second stage of development. Finally, there is the "realistic stage" that targets people who are seventeen years old and above "with sub stages of exploration, crystallization and specification" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.14). Actually, the third stage may be general in terms of equalizing those who can be in the university stage with adults who have been passing through many years of experience in the work placement. This might be because people at that time are more concerned about their high school studies that will move them directly to working in the field without going through the higher education level.

"Super (1957) extended Ginzberg's three life stages to five, with slightly different sub stages. He also developed the concept of vocational maturity, which may or may not correspond to chronological age" (cited in ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.14-15). The first stage is "growth" and it lasts up to 14 years of age. This is when children are passing through their pre-school, elementary school, and middle school stages. The second stage is "exploration" and it targets individuals who are 15-24 years old "with the sub stages of crystallization, specification and implementation" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.15). It is therefore considering individuals who are expected to be in high school and higher education levels. The third stage is "establishment" and it covers individuals who are 25-44 years old "with sub stages of stabilization, consolidation and advancing" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.15). That is when people are adults and are mature enough to understand themselves and can therefore make better decisions of improving their career choices. People in this stage may also pursue their education to gain Masters and Doctorate degrees. The fourth stage is "maintenance" and it lasts from 45 to 64 years "with sub stages of holding, updating and innovating" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.15). "Finally the fifth stage of decline from age sixty-five onwards, with sub stages decelerating, retirement planning and retirement living" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.15). This is when people become old enough and less productive in their work environments, so it will be beneficial for them to think about spreading their experience to someone else who can replace them effectively. Those people might also think about depending on themselves, as they were able to build their lives through different stages of life so it is time to focus on their own business or project for the sake of pursuing the rest of their lives.

Singapore, which recent studies reveal is the fifth best country in the world in providing education (Pearson, 2012), is following the developmental theory for their career guidance programs (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). The Ministry of Education in Singapore has developed an Education and career guidance program (ECG) following a "developmental process that facilitates the acquisition of attitudes, skills and knowledge to help students better understand themselves, explore viable education and career options, make informed decisions and develop plans to achieve their career aspirations" (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). Since the developmental theory suggests implementing career guidance over different phases of an individual's life, Singapore is following a similar approach in their schools (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). Career guidance in Singapore begins from an early stage at the primary level, and continues at the secondary level. Students can also get advantage from the school services of career guidance until they

graduate from a secondary school lasting for up to 6 months after graduation in what is called a postsecondary phase (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012).

Students can also be guided through their careers by following the Tiered structure, where students are guided first as a whole group, in which they can be guided using one-to-one approach with an involvement of parents in the process. Sometimes, there will be special counselling sessions for a student or group of learners who need extra support (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). The figure demonstrates the application of a tiered structure that is applied in schools in Singapore.

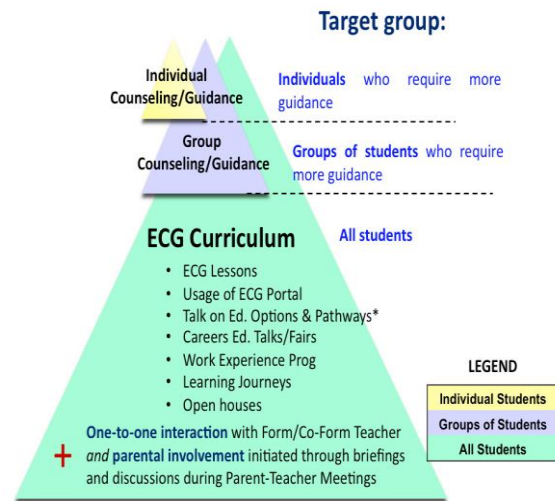


Figure 1. Career Tiered Structure

Ministry of Education Singapore. (2012). *Education and Career Guidance*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/social-emotional-learning/education-career-guidance/> [Accessed: 20 November 2012].

What is most interesting about this program is that it involves self-exploration for career guidance by students, as it includes a special web-portal (ecareers.sg) that is designed for the different levels of primary, and secondary and postsecondary levels (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). "Some of the key features of the portal include career assessment tools, which allows students to discover more about their career profile, and a database of information on various occupations and education institutions (local and overseas), which provide students with accurate information to make more informed education and career choices" (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). Linking technological aspects to traditional vocational methods has an effective impact in enriching the students' information and skills, since they can be guided



to select their future careers from not only career guidance officers or teachers, but also through using an online portal even while they are at home. This can also involve their parents easily in the process of guiding their children to make decisions about their careers, since they can view useful content about career skills and information from home while connecting to the internet.

Community Interaction Theory

"According to this theory, the most significant factors in occupational choice are the interpersonal transactions conducted in local settings" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.36). Law has discovered the communication interaction theory in 1981 suggesting the following:

"A number of modes or sources of community influence are identified, specifically: expectations, from an individual's family and community groups; feedback, referring to the varied messages that individuals receive about their suitability for particular occupations and roles; support, relating to the reinforcement of young people's aspirations; modelling, referring to the process by which people are influenced by example; and finally, information, which is defined as young people's observations of other people's work habits and patterns" (Ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p. 36).

Years later, Law developed his theory by adding some aspects that can improve his work and support the application of career guidance. This was in 1996 as he added "additional propositions relating to the roles of innate abilities, more advanced abilities and feelings in career choice" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.36). "He identifies the processes linked with these abilities as understanding, focusing, sensing and sifting, arguing that the more developed capacities cannot be engaged unless some basic capacities have been effectively developed to support them" (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.36).

With regards to the ability of the community to influence the selection of an individual's career, education is still a significant contributor to developing one's skills and competencies as claimed by Law (1996) in (ed. Gikopoulou, 2008, p.36). Therefore, career choices can be best achieved when being influenced by both the community of the individual consisting of his/her teachers, family members, neighbors, and acquaintances along with the education he/she gains from the school including general and vocational education.

Brown notes (2009) that innovative leaders are those that believe in change in order to develop the performance of others and create better solutions for any challenges that might face others. One of the innovative leaders in career guidance in secondary schools is Jesse Buttrick Davis who also believes in creating equal

opportunities for both females and males to be educated (Pope, 2009). It is not only that which makes him special, but also his concern about establishing career guidance in public schools as they provide free education for the United States citizens (Pope, 2009). It is stated that "Davis was the first school guidance counsellor in the United States and was the first person in the United States to implement a systematic guidance program in the public schools" (Brewer, 1942; Davis, 1914; Gladding, 2006; Schmidt, 2003) in (Pope, 2009, p.257). It is also mentioned that Davis' position has been transformed "from a high school teacher to a college of education dean over his lifetime" along with being involved in career guidance in some of the public high schools (Pope, 2009, 258). This change has been identified as Davis was a high school student thinking about what he wants to study or do after graduating and he could not find an answer from anyone in the school since there was no one to approach for career guidance in the United States high schools at that time (Davis, 1956b, p, 36 in Pope, 2009, p. 249). Such a decision was made when Davis became a high school principal (Pope, 2009, p. 252), which gives the authority to a top-level administrator to contribute in making decisions that will influence others positively. A person might think of an inspiring idea and suggest it to those who hold higher positions in the organizations' hierarchy to enhance a system and contribute to the development of the organization. This is because the role of the leader in this case is to be open-minded and involve others in making decisions to build a better community (Brown, 2009; Johannes, 2007).

A study proposed by Farah & Ridge (2009) from the Dubai School of public (DSG) highlighted issues related to the curriculum used in Dubai and the northern emirates. They explained the concept "curriculum" in three approaches: intended curriculum, implemented curriculum, and attained curriculum. They found that the intended curriculum, which "includes the guiding documents produced by the Ministry of Education or other education authorities which dictate how much, how often and what should be taught in schools" (Farah & Ridge, 2009, p. 1), is designed in a way that forces a teacher-centred approach rather than a student-centred approach. Thus, it is focusing on the theoretical approach rather than the practical approach.

His highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, the President of Dubai, expressed the demand for providing better education for the new generation (Shahbandari, 2012). Thus, as a leader, he implemented the smart learning initiative that consists of replacing books with PC tablets for each student (Shahbandari, 2012). Employing such an initiative in Dubai and the northern emirates is an attempt towards transmitting the delivery of learning to be more student-centred, which contributes



in creating better chances for students to attain information and skills that will support them in building a better future.

Integrating career guidance will often add more practical learning environments since the students will benefit from putting theory into practice that can be implemented in one's life (Ahmed, 2012). Transferring some teachers to be career guidance officers (Ahmed, 2012) has also its value in developing their performance and enforcing their leadership skills. Career guidance officers are decision makers, as they will hold the responsibility of preparing the generation for selecting their future professions or careers. Decision makers are one of the key elements in influencing career guidance programs to meet the students' needs in schools through executing "strong administrative leadership and support, financial backing, ongoing program evaluation, qualified personnel, organized professional development activities, and follow-up of program graduates and non-completers" (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2) in (NCRVE, n.d.).

Firstly, strong administrative leadership and support can be implemented by administrators, who are open-minded and welcome suggestions and feedback from school guidance officers in order to make progress. These administrators are also precise in hiring employees who shall contribute in the success of the career guidance program. They are also considering programs that foster professional development in school guidance officers and innovative programs for students to understand their future steps appropriately (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2 in NCRVE, n.d.). Secondly, leaders can provide financial support to facilitate career guidance programs in providing their requirements, such as providing resources that can be used in guiding the students towards understanding their career, funding professional development programs for guidance officers, and arranging field trip payments (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2 in NCRVE, n.d.). Thirdly, ongoing assessment is another key component that requires leaders' support. Decision makers examine the key areas that are to be overlooked by school guidance officers in order to evaluate the effectiveness of each school's career guidance programs. (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2 in NCRVE, n.d.). Fourthly, there is a crucial need for employing qualified personnel who are responsible for developing and designing the programs of career guidance in schools. For that reason, decision makers are accountable for hiring professionals who are fully prepared for such a vital role (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2 in NCRVE, n.d.). Fifthly, since school guidance officers are guiding students towards selecting their career paths, they need to be updated with data about the recent required competencies, approaches, activities, professions and job market requirements in

order to apply best practices in directing the students to the right paths (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2 in NCRVE, n.d.).

Finally, education decision makers and policy makers can also strengthen the career guidance programs by creating a system that allows continuous communication between the guidance officers and their students even after graduating from schools, and this will be supportive in evaluating the effectiveness of the program, as the students provide information about their development either in higher education institutions or work settings. Following up on graduates will justify whether career guidance in schools has been able to accomplish the goals of the students and shape their career paths or not. (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994, p.2 in NCRVE, n.d.).

Challenges of Career Guidance in Secondary Girls' Schools

Addressing the challenges that face the implementation of career guidance programs in secondary schools at international, national, and local levels is crucial to improve the upcoming career guidance programs in UAE. One of the challenges of implementing career guidance in secondary schools is reported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the United States, as they "found that most guidance officers of high schools were overworked and underprepared to help students make decisions about their postsecondary future" (Johnson & Rochkind, 2011) in (Anctil et al., 2012, p.112). Additionally, school guidance officers are responsible for supervising a large scale of students that can vary from one state to another, including around 460 to 1000 students per counsellor (ASCA, 2010b in Anctil et al., 2012, p.112). Another challenge concerning career guidance in the US secondary schools is "whether the renewed vigor and emphasis on academic assessment has created difficulty in scheduling classroom time for career development" (ASCA, 2010b in Anctil et al., 2012, p.112). As career guidance is a new experience for UAE schools, the current challenge lies in selecting appropriate staff that can be transformed into career guidance officers in UAE secondary, preparatory, and primary schools (Ahmed, 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Both a qualitative and quantitative approach guided this study, which looked at career guidance in three female public secondary schools in Dubai. The research participants include 3 social workers and 100 students at these three schools. Social workers are responsible for helping students cope with school issues and benefit from career guidance.



Because social workers and students are the most important key players to explore the impact of career guidance in preparing Emirati female students for the job market, these two groups were selected for the study, whose main research question was: *What are some social workers and students' perceptions about how the career guidance provided in schools of Dubai support secondary school female students?*

3.1 Interviews

First, we used one-to-one interviews, which is a qualitative approach used for collecting data. Three social workers were interviewed and they explained their school practices to guide students throughout their career path. The social workers were informed of the objectives of the study through a written formal letter. The social workers were interviewed to understand the role they play in guiding Emirati female students to effectively select suitable career paths. Since the interview is a type of qualitative research design, it passed through different steps in order to study the impact of career guidance from the perspective of social workers. Surveying students was the second key component to obtaining valid and reliable responses regarding school practices of career guidance. A questionnaire with responses based on a Likert scale, which is a quantitative method, was distributed to 100 students, since interviewing such a number would have been impractical. The social workers' interview was conducted in the following phases:

- Phase One: Obtain permission from the social workers to participate in the study.
- Phase Two: Distribute the interview question form to the three social workers and select a day for meeting each of them.
- Phase Three: Interview the social workers.
- Phase Four: Identify the variables in order to create a clear structure out of the participants' responses and exclude repeat responses.
- Phase Five: Analyse the coded data and link it "to other data and to theory" (Schneider, 2009, p.146).

3.2 Questionnaires

The other method of data acquisition was via quantitative data collection that included designing a questionnaire to explore students' perceptions of career guidance in their schools. A Likert scale was developed as a method for responding to the questionnaire. The questionnaire included two sections. The first was general questions about the students' backgrounds, with multiple-choice answers. The second section included statements about their perceptions of career guidance. This section addressed the research questions listed

earlier, on whether public schools are effective in preparing female students for their future careers. Additionally, it measured the social workers' role in guiding the students, and the influence of the school in job market preparation. In this case, the responses were designed to use a Likert rating scale with five options (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The implementation of the questionnaire passed through the following phases:

- Phase One: A pilot study was conducted on two eleventh-graders prior to distributing the questionnaire to a wider number of students, in order to measure the effectiveness of the students' responses in answering the research questions.
- Phase Two: The objectives of the study and the process of answering the questionnaire was explained to the sample students.
- Phase Three: The students were asked to answer general multiple-choice questions about their background.
- Phase Four: Statements about students' perceptions of career guidance were included. This section addressed the research questions listed earlier using the method of a rating scale with a range of five options (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree).

IV. RESULTS

This section introduces the results of both the interview and the questionnaire. The results of the study are intended to shed light on the impact of career guidance in Dubai secondary public schools. The results of the interviews with the social workers consider topics related to the profession, career guidance, professional development, and suggestions for improvement. The results of the student questionnaire cover topics including school services, social worker roles, teacher roles, the intended curriculum, solutions, and suggestions. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the schools and participants, for ethical and confidentiality reasons.

4.1 Collated Data from Interviews

Three social workers from three different schools were interviewed in order to understand their approach to career guidance in their schools. Their responses were analysed under the subheadings: profession, career guidance, professional development, and suggestions.

The three social workers all do in fact provide career guidance advice to students. Maryam stated, "Yes we do, and that is based on acquired experience and communication with the allocated stakeholders. We do what we are able to do, especially since we have attended workshops on career guidance, so we try to apply what we learnt from these workshops."



When asking them about their ability as social workers to provide career guidance programs to all school students in addition to their main role, each one used a different approach. Maryam felt that each student needs special consideration when it comes to career guidance, so she is facing difficulties in providing career guidance along with practicing her main role as a social worker. However, Aisha stated, "I work with a team of teachers and we give them direction according to their profession, to go with students on fieldtrips, such as the Department of Electricity. Interestingly, Reem reported that she and the other social worker in the school used to handle this role, but now they have just recruited an academic counsellor who is dealing with career guidance.

Two social workers claimed that students seek their guidance on family and personal matters more than their studies and future career issues. However, Reem claimed, "Students rarely talk about issues related to their family or personal life. They mostly ask about their studies and which section they should join (Arts or Science)".

The three participants agreed that career guidance is a very important aspect to consider at secondary school level. Maryam argued, "Tenth graders do not have plans for their future, and they do not have goals. That is why we think that career guidance is extremely important at this stage of their life." Aisha added, "In our school, we take the girls to different educational institutions and we bring lecturers to raise awareness about their higher education institutions' programs that can serve the students. We want the girls to benefit from these opportunities to make decisions about their future career as soon as possible."

The social workers provide various career guidance to support the students in selecting their career paths. All the respondents engage their students in visiting higher education institutions, such as Zayed University and Higher Colleges of Technology. The three participants took students to the Electricity and Water Authority in Dubai, and Dubai Municipality, including its laboratories, career fairs, and hospitals. Maryam took her students to attend a live court hearing. Reem also took students to forensic laboratories and banks. The social workers also considered the students' interests when arranging school activities, trips, and workshops and felt these should be related to the students' specialization, whether it be Arts or Sciences. The social workers listed several programs to develop the students' communication skills. One mentioned that in their school, the students introduced morning assembly programs by speaking about different beneficial issues. Additionally, an eleventh grader held the role of introducing the secondary school rules, practices, and regulations for newcomer tenth graders. Student council members

supported the social workers in organizing different programs, by inviting and welcoming professional lecturers as part of the program *I PROGRESS WITH MY MANNERS*. The social worker Maryam claimed, *I PROGRESS WITH MY MANNERS* has helped the students learn how to deal with others by using positive attitudes and avoiding negative attitudes." There are other programs related to communication skills held at The Creative Thinkers School. One of these programs is held by *Noor Centre* and it mainly focuses on developing the students' communication skills by considering social, religious, safety and security, and national identity aspects. Aisha also added, "We also go to the elderly centre in order to teach students how to communicate with the elderly. However, the third school, the Genius Scholars School, undertakes the program *I AM A LEADER* by selecting some students each Thursday to practice the roles of the principal, vice principal, social worker, and nurse, in order to develop their communication skills, to deal with those who approach the school, such as teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders. One more practice held by the same school is developing a special centre called '*Talents and Abilities*' where students work according to their talents. They also have special portfolios where they can add their work, based on prior goals they have defined, called '*My progress is by achieving my goals.*' The three social workers reported that the biggest challenge for them is the parents, as they can impede the progress of their daughters. To address this issue, social workers follow certain procedures, each according to their own knowledge and experience. The three participants also argued that many students do not have a clear picture of what they want for their future and which path to select, so another big challenge for them is spending time and effort to guide students and convince them to strive for their future career plans.

The three social workers attend an annual workshop directed by the MOE, in association with higher education institutions and the National Admissions and Placement Office (NAPO). Reem stated, "In this workshop, they raise awareness on how to link the students to the public institutions, such as Zayed University and Higher Colleges of Technology. They show us how to contact NAPO via email to enrol students as they graduate from high school." She added, "Through their guidance we can submit the application forms of graduates from our school to be placed in higher education institutions."

The three social workers said it is difficult to provide career guidance as there is no student time allocated for that purpose, and there are no special sessions. As an attempt to improve career guidance in her school, Reem suggested, "Students need special time away from class in order to visit the different educational institutions."



Aisha related to the same issue saying, "The Ministry of Education should allocate time for career guidance before the holidays when teachers are free of teaching." Maryam added, "We need Ministry of Education support to allocate professionals to guide student selection of career path, and to provide special sessions for this particular purpose."

Aisha also believes that career guidance can be effectively improved in her school with parental support. She stated that she arranges workshops to raise awareness amongst parents, but she finds it more effective when this decision comes from the policymakers of the MOE. She claimed, 'It is different when there is a formal decision from the Ministry of Education to provide awareness to parents about the importance of guiding their daughters to the right path'.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The students were asked in the General Information section about what they want to do after graduating from high school. We found 90 out of 100 students wanted to complete higher education studies, while 9 preferred working and one wanted to stay at home.

The participants' answers regarding the question "What job do you see yourself doing in the next few years?" varied between doctor, engineer, pilot, teacher, and social counsellor. Interestingly, students wanting to be engineers selected many jobs related to engineering, such as chemical engineer, petroleum engineer, IT engineer, geological engineer, and architect. Some chose new fields to Emirati females, such as solar energy, nuclear energy, and astronomy. However, 21 students stated they either have no idea about their future career or have not planned that yet, and a number left the space empty with no response.

School Services

Of the student respondents, 67% chose either strong agreement or agreement that their school provided visits to different colleges and universities as part of the career guidance initiative.

In response to "The school delivers various workshops that can help me to set my goals and select my future career," 51% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed, while 23% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 26% selected the option 'neutral.' Only 30% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, "The school takes me on trips to different work placements in order for me to know about the range of jobs." Around half of the respondents (46 out of 97) strongly agreed or agreed about the ability of the school to design extra-curricular activities to help them express their abilities and practice their talents. On the other hand, 22 out of 97 participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. 47% of the

respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their school provides a systematic program of career guidance, while 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed. On the other hand, 22% selected the option 'neutral.' 34% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school provides special sessions for career guidance. However, 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A number selected the option 'neutral.' 42% of respondents showed strong agreement or agreement about the success of their school to provide aptitude tests to identify student abilities. However, 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 25% of the participants were neutral.

The mode – the most common number, was extracted from the frequencies tab using SPSS software, to measure satisfaction with school services in guiding students towards their career path. The Likert scale was designed to reflect a range from 1 to 5, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For example, the mode '1' represented that students strongly agreed with the school service in question. Overall, the average of the mode that represented the different school services was 2.3, which means that students were largely positive towards the school services provided for career guidance. They were satisfied with 4 of the services, while they were not satisfied with two of the services, such as providing workshops to allow the students to identify their goals, and provide special sessions for career guidance. They were also not fully satisfied with the ability of their schools to provide extracurricular activities.

Social Worker's Role

More than half of the respondents (57 out of 100) agreed or strongly agreed that they could seek guidance from the school social worker/s about their future. However, 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 22% were neutral on this issue. The student responses on the ability of the social worker/s to help them in tackling issues with their studies and their personal life varied, since 63% either agreed or strongly agreed, while only 16% gave a negative response. Others were neutral on this particular statement. More than half of the respondents (55 out of 100) either strongly agreed or agreed that the social worker/s gave advice whenever possible about their future plans. On the other hand, 37% of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a quarter of the respondents were neutral on this issue. In response to the statement "The social worker allows me the chance to participate in programs that enhance my communication skills," 57% of the participants showed agreement or strong agreement, 18% showed either disagreement or strong disagreement, and 25% showed a neutral response. Overall, students were strongly satisfied with their social workers' role, since the mode '1' for most answers showed strong agreement amongst the



participants towards the role of their social workers in guiding them to effectively select their career paths.

Teachers' Role

Less than half of the participants (47 out of 100) either agreed or strongly agreed that teachers discussed topics that inspired them to choose their career path. Additionally, 30 out of 100 of the respondents somewhat agreed, while 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The overall selection of options related to the teachers' role showed that the mode for the statement "Teachers discuss topics that inspire me to choose my career path" is '2'. Generally, students agreed with the previous statement related to the teachers' role. However, the mode '1' showed strong agreement with the statement "Teachers often ask me do projects based on my interests and abilities." Therefore, the students are satisfied with their teachers' role in guiding them towards selecting their career.

The Intended Curriculum

Only 25% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to seek guidance from curriculum textbooks used at school. Additionally, 38% somewhat agreed, while 37% either disagreed or strongly disagreed on the topic. 31% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that curriculum textbooks helped them to improve communication skills. Equally, 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed on this particular statement, and 38% somewhat agreed about the same issue. 32% strongly agreed or agreed, 31% somewhat agreed, and 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed that curriculum textbooks helped them to make informed decisions about what career they see themselves going into. Two students did not respond to this statement. In response to the statement "I attain different skills that will help me in my future career from the textbooks," only 7% of the participants strongly agreed, 21% agreed, and 32% somewhat agreed, while 26% disagreed, and 12% strongly disagreed. Two participants did not respond.

Around half of the participants showed a negative response towards the relevancy of curriculum subjects they are studying at the moment to their future career prospects, since 48% of the students either disagreed or strongly disagreed on this issue. Only 6 strongly agreed, 17 agreed, and 28 somewhat agreed on this particular topic. Only one participant failed to respond.

Solutions

The questionnaire included a range of options to improve career guidance in public schools. Most students were positive towards applying the suggested solutions. However, some were ranked higher than others by the students.

The first option was that "The Ministry of Education should reduce the number of subjects in the UAE curriculum, and make some elective rather than compulsory." Most participants (78 out of 100) strongly agreed on the importance of this approach. The second option was "The Ministry of Education should provide career guidance officers in schools." In response, 70% strongly agreed, while 23% agreed, 6% somewhat agreed, and only one respondent disagreed. The third option was strongly supported by 79% of the participants, and 17% also agreed. Students should have access to work placements for a period of time. The fourth suggestion was "There should be special sessions for career guidance at the school as part of the curriculum." 64% of the participants strongly agreed and 24% of them agreed. The fifth suggestion received the highest ranking: 87% of students strongly agreed that the school should arrange trips and career fairs. The sixth option received the least student support: only 69% of students strongly agreed that the Ministry of Education should design a website or web-portal that includes information and activities to guide Emirati students in selecting their career paths; also, 24% agreed, 5% somewhat agreed, and only 2% disagreed with this suggestion.

V. DISCUSSION

Here we present the findings that were analysed previously. We explore whether public schools in Dubai effectively prepare Emirati female students for the job market and look at the impact of the social workers' role in providing support and guidance to Emirati students to effectively select their career paths. We also shed light on the activities and programs offered to students to prepare them for the job market.

The main research question has been answered concentrating on two aspects, which are career guidance services in Dubai public schools, and the expected role of current career guidance officers in this process. The findings indicate some students do not have a clear picture of their goals and future plans. They are relatively unaware of jobs in the marketplace. Additionally, according to the findings, social workers are handling career guidance issues currently, but the Ministry has just started recruiting career guidance officers to hold this responsibility. Moreover, school students are not fully prepared for the job market in the UAE as only half of them are satisfied with school services, the teachers' role, the intended curriculum, and the social workers' role in providing career guidance to prepare them for the job market. Furthermore, public schools mainly provide visits to colleges and universities, design workshops to identify student goals, and provide aptitude testing as support and guidance for Emirati female students to prepare them for the job market. Most importantly, it was



found that social workers were the most influential element in supporting career decisions, according to 60% of the students.

To answer the research sub-question “Do public schools in Dubai effectively prepare Emirati female students for the job market?”, we can say that public schools are utilizing their experience and knowledge to prepare Emirati female students for the job market, according to the social workers’ explanation of their own and their school practices in this field. However, students do not feel they are fully prepared for the job market, according to their perceptions and responses. Overall, the future holds an optimistic view of career guidance, since the Ministry of Education is now preparing career guidance officers who have just been recruited for career counselling. This was clearly emphasized when approaching one of the secondary schools to conduct an interview with the social worker. She announced, “An academic counsellor has been appointed for our school, but in the meantime before she arrives, we and the other social worker in the school are providing career guidance.” When asked when the academic counsellor was recruited, she stated that it was in March 2013.

The third research sub-question, what role should the newly recruited career counsellor play in equipping young Emirati females for the job market. Aims at bridging the gap in current career guidance in public schools in order to make progress in the field. This question has been selected after recognizing the initiative held by the Ministry of Education to integrate career guidance into our public schools, by first transferring 17 teachers into career counselling (Halawa, 2012).

According to the findings of the study, based on student perception of career guidance, the students report that their schools do not fully support them in designing extra-curricular activities to express their talents. Additionally, two, taking students to different work placements, and providing special sessions for career guidance, are not available based on student responses. Additionally, social workers highlighted their inability to provide career guidance effectively to the students, because the heavy teaching workload requires teachers to finish on time and prepare students for the end of semester exams. Therefore, social workers suggested allocating special sessions to provide career guidance for students. They have also mentioned that parents may not allow their daughters to pursue their education or select their career path. Parents sometimes prefer to make decisions for their daughters about their future plans, which may cause students to drop out of the job market, become inactive, or enter a field which is of no interest to them and which they do not pursue further.

Alsabaey (2012) indicated that career guidance projects should be implemented in three phases. The first phase will consider the elementary level that concentrates

on self-development through improving the students’ academic and communication skills. The second phase targets middle school students and aims at focusing on academic development through building student cognitive and performance skills. The third and last phase will target secondary school students and it will concentrate more on the students’ professional development through raising awareness of the requirements of the job market and various effective ways of selecting appropriate courses and specializations. The Ministry of Education has been working on the third phase and will transfer to the first and second phases in the future, taking into account that career guidance will be fully implemented in UAE public schools by the year 2018. Alabdooli (2012) also stated that this project consists of various events and activities, such as some periods for career guidance, individual and group guidance sessions, workshops, lectures, seminars, and summer training sessions. Additionally, she gave assurances that this project includes a variety of activities that shall prepare the students for their future careers considering the variations of their ages, personalities, and preferences (Alsabaey, 2012).

Accordingly, the recently recruited career guidance officers are expected to provide individual and group guidance sessions, as highly required and requested by both social workers and students in public schools. Additionally, they are expected to provide a systematic career guidance program that includes designing workshops, lectures and seminars to prepare students for the job market. Moreover, career guidance officers are expected to take students to different work placements in order to recognize current available jobs in the market. Furthermore, they are expected to raise awareness amongst parents about considering their daughters’ interests in order to guide them to selecting their future career. These responsibilities of the career guidance officers can really make a difference in terms of improving the quality of career guidance in public schools, since they are expected to be professional in the field. Career guidance officers are also expected to bridge the gap and handle the responsibilities that social workers found either challenging or not part of their responsibilities, freeing them to handle other important issues.

VI. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The study examined the impact of career guidance in public secondary schools in supporting and guiding students to their career effectively, assessing the extent to which the Ministry of Education vision and strategic initiative supports career guidance in schools, identifying who is mainly responsible for career guidance in Dubai secondary schools, exploring the effectiveness of communication between Dubai public schools and other



institutions, such as the public and private sectors, which can provide practical work placement opportunities for students, raising awareness of the importance of career guidance in preparing students, recommending creative solutions for providing career guidance in Dubai public schools, raising awareness of the importance of developing a sustainable link between Dubai schools and universities to offer curriculum related to job market requirements in order to prepare students for current required positions, and directing Emirati staff/teachers towards specializing in career counselling, which is required as an innovative career path in Dubai public schools currently.

A sample of one hundred students and three social workers have participated in this study, resulting in the following key findings; first, even though social workers are currently practicing various strategies in order to help prepare students in their career selection, they faced challenges, such as parental objections and the heavy teaching workloads in addition to their career guidance role. Students reported that they satisfied with the social workers' role. The teachers' role in career guidance comes tends to come as a secondary priority. Students are also satisfied with support the school is offering (least satisfied with the prescribed curriculum to prepare them for their future career). The recently recruited career guidance officers are expected to bridge this gap and provide systematic career guidance programs.

Based on the findings of the study, and data from the social workers and students there are several recommendations that can be considered by educational decision makers and policy makers. One of the key recommendations; is the curriculum should be adopted or some subjects of the intended curriculum can be selected by students as elective rather than compulsory to consider the students' interests and needs. Secondly, special tailor-made sessions should be allocated for career guidance in public schools delivered by experts in career guidance. Thirdly, the Ministry of Education needs to motivate and encourage teachers to move into career guidance as a career to accomplish the initiative of providing career guidance in public Schools. Fourthly, the Ministry of Education should provide programs related to career guidance in order to direct Emirati students to become experts in this field and therefore prepare them to become career guidance officers in UAE Schools. Policy makers in the Ministry of Education should also allow students to work in real working environments for a period of time as part of an apprenticeship program or work experience. This should be made compulsory for all grade 9 and 10 students. The Ministry of Education should raise awareness amongst the parent community in order for them to support their children in selecting their future career paths by

designing special workshops. Developing a web-portal that includes different career guidance services, where there is a listing of available jobs in the market along with an online portfolio of the student records based on their progress in seeking career guidance, will be beneficial and will contribute in raising awareness amongst students and their parents as progress can be monitored and evaluated.

For the purpose of further research, we recommend repeating aspects of the study with some modifications in order evaluate whether there is progress in recruiting career guidance officers in the schools and after the project becomes fully implemented. However, instead of interviewing the social workers this time, the career guidance officers will be interviewed. Additionally, a larger sample of both students and career guidance officers will be included in the future research.

During this research, we faced a number of challenges mainly in time constraints in collecting data, mainly in conducting further interviews and distribute the questionnaire to a larger sample including at least all the public female secondary schools in Dubai.

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